

# NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL

## Monterey, California



# THESIS

UNIT COHESION  
AND THE MILITARY'S  
"DON'T ASK, DON'T TELL" POLICY

by

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March, 1997

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**UNIT COHESION  
AND THE MILITARY'S  
"DON'T ASK, DON'T TELL" POLICY**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment  
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## **ABSTRACT**

The Department of Defense policy of excluding known homosexuals from military service is partially based on the assumption that homosexual service members pose a threat to the cohesion of a military unit. The assumption is drawn largely from anecdotal evidence suggesting that junior service members would be uncomfortable in an environment that accepted homosexuals. This thesis examines the attitudes and opinions of junior officers to determine various aspects of unit cohesion that may be affected by homosexual service members. A series of seven focus group interviews were conducted with officers attending the Naval Postgraduate School in 1996. Analysis of the focus group interviews indicates that junior officers may be far more tolerant toward differing sexual preferences than is assumed; and that the commission of inappropriate acts, such as fraternization, assault, or sexual harassment, may form a stronger basis for exclusion of personnel than sexual preference. Military leaders intent on achieving and maintaining unit cohesion should reexamine the impact that homosexuals have on unit cohesion.



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## I. INTRODUCTION

The Department of Defense policy of excluding known homosexuals from military service is largely based on the assumption that homosexual service members pose a threat to the cohesion of military units. This assumption is drawn from anecdotal evidence presented by senior officers suggesting that junior service members would be so uncomfortable in an environment that accepts homosexuals as to seriously impair the unit's ability to accomplish its mission.

Policy resulting from this assumption has been labeled "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," referring to the military's intent to allow homosexuals to serve in the military as long as the person does not disclose his or her sexual preference through actions or words. The exclusion of homosexuals from military service is not a recently developed policy; homosexuality has been deemed harmful to the military by policy makers in some fashion since the beginning of U.S. history. In the past, however, military leaders relied on arguments suggesting that a homosexual posed a danger to national concerns. For instance, prior policies were based on the assumption that homosexual members were mentally ill or were more likely than heterosexual members to violate national security. "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" downplays these historical assumptions and relies almost solely on the argument that heterosexuals would not be willing to work in a military unit with known homosexuals. In a very real sense, "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" is a compromise policy designed to protect the comfort of the heterosexual military majority. The policy

implies that, if heterosexual members of a military unit are unaware that they are living and working with a homosexual, relatively little danger to the cohesion of the unit exists; if a homosexual discloses his or her sexual orientation, however, the unit is at risk of losing the cohesion deemed necessary to complete its mission.

This thesis explores the assumption that unit cohesion is weakened if heterosexual service members know they are living and working with a homosexual. Additionally, the thesis attempts to discover specific factors that may be important to unit cohesion, and what effect homosexual unit members may have on these factors. Specifically, the author conducted focus group interviews with Navy officers attending the Naval Postgraduate School in 1996 to evaluate whether "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" is based on a correct assumption. These qualitative data are not intended to be generalized to the military population as a whole, or even to the Navy population. Nevertheless, the information gathered here can be used by policy makers in assessing the fundamental premise of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" as well as its operational effectiveness.

Chapter II is a brief description of the treatment of homosexuals by the U.S. military, and a cursory explanation of the current policy. Chapter III presents a literature review of military unit cohesion and provides a foundation for further discussion of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" and unit cohesion. The focus group methodology used to gather data for this thesis is explained in Chapter IV. An analysis of the focus group interviews is presented in Chapter V. Conclusions regarding the effect that homosexuals have on unit cohesion are presented in Chapter VI along with recommendations for further research.

## II. “DON’T ASK, DON’T TELL”

This chapter briefly describes the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy and frames it in a historical context. The scope of this research concerns the policy as it applies to unit cohesion, but the author feels that background information regarding the policy is necessary to fully explore the topic. The sociological and legal nuances in “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” are complex and are described in literature discussing the policy.<sup>1</sup> The brief definition given in this chapter is not intended to fully explain the policy, but should provide sufficient background to support the study of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” and unit cohesion. Likewise, the history of the military’s exclusion of homosexuals is much more complicated than presented here. This short synopsis is intended to provide background for the discussion of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” and unit cohesion.

### A. THE POLICY DEFINED

The underlying theme of the current policy banning homosexuals from military service is that “homosexuality is incompatible with military service.”<sup>2</sup> This theme of exclusion for incompatibility was first delineated in a policy instituted in 1982 and then reiterated in the current policy implemented in 1993:

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<sup>1</sup> Melissa Petry-Wells, *Exclusion: Homosexuals and the Right to Serve* (Washington: Regnery Gateway, 1993).

<sup>2</sup> Office of the Secretary of Defense, “Summary Report of the Military Working Group: Recommended DOD Homosexual Policy Outline,” 8 June 1993.

The presence of such members adversely affects the ability of the Military Services to maintain discipline, good order, and morale; to foster mutual trust and confidence among service members; to ensure the integrity of the system of rank and command; to facilitate assignment and worldwide deployment of service members who frequently must live and work under close conditions affording minimal privacy; to recruit and retain members of the Military Services; to maintain the public acceptability of military service; and to prevent breaches of security.<sup>3</sup>

To exclude homosexuals from military service in support of this 1982 policy, the military actively sought to determine if individuals were homosexual. Prospective recruits were questioned regarding their sexual orientation and denied entry to military service if they admitted to being homosexual. At the same time, active-duty members were discharged if they were identified as homosexual.

According to the Department of Defense (DOD), the exclusionary policy reflects the judgment of military leaders that homosexuals pose a threat to good order and discipline, and therefore interfere with mission accomplishment.<sup>4</sup> DOD claims that, although earlier exclusion policies may have been based on an assumption that homosexuality is a mental disorder, the current policy makes no such assumption.<sup>5</sup> Further, DOD reports that other concerns about homosexuals in the military, such as being

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<sup>3</sup> Department of Defense Directive 1332.14, January 28, 1982.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. General Accounting Office, "DOD's Policy on Homosexuality: Report to Congressional Requesters on Defense Force Management," *Gays: In or Out? The U.S. Military and Homosexuals--A Sourcebook* (Washington: Brassey's, 1993), 59.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

a security risk, are of relatively low importance when compared with the preservation of good order and discipline.<sup>6</sup>

The most recent version of DOD's homosexual policy, commonly referred to as "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," is almost identical to the 1982 policy. "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," implemented in 1993, imposes a restriction on asking recruits or active military members about their sexual orientation. The subtlety of differences between the 1982 policy and its 1993 replacement is found in this restriction. Under the earlier policy, prospective recruits were asked about their sexual orientation and were denied entry to military service if they disclosed that they had homosexual tendencies. Additionally, members suspected of homosexual activity, or homosexual tendencies, could be investigated in an effort to ferret out homosexuals for discharge. The 1993 policy stipulates that prospective recruits will not be questioned about their sexual orientation, nor will they be required to disclose their sexual orientation. It also provides guidelines to be used by commanders before initiating investigations of suspected homosexuals in the military.<sup>7</sup>

Essentially, the current policy maintains the same assumption as the 1982 policy--that is, that homosexuality is incompatible with military service--but acknowledges that homosexuals have served honorably, and will continue to serve honorably, in the military. The assumption that homosexuality would interfere with good order and discipline stems from the anticipated reaction of heterosexuals who may feel uncomfortable working with

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Secretary of Defense Preliminary Guidelines on Homosexuals in the Military, July 19, 1993.

homosexuals. Current DOD guidelines maintain that sexual preference is a private matter and that, as long as a homosexual does not openly profess, or behave in a manner suggesting, homosexuality, he or she will be allowed to serve in the military.<sup>8</sup>

## B. HISTORY OF EXCLUSION

Recent public and media attention on homosexuals in the military should not obscure the long-standing exclusion of homosexuals from military service. The issue is not new to military leaders, although it may be new to the public. Likewise, recent attention should not lead readers to believe that the military has never tolerated homosexuals. The history of exclusionary practices against homosexuals in the U.S. military spans the history of the military itself. Randy Shilts, in his book, *Conduct Unbecoming*, describes the case of an Army officer discharged for sodomy in 1778.<sup>9</sup> Conversely, Shilts and other authors describe honorable military careers of closeted and known homosexuals throughout American history.<sup>10</sup>

David F. Burrelli concisely tracks the legal history of exclusionary practices under military law.<sup>11</sup> Prior to World War I, homosexuals were not specifically banned from

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Randy Shilts, *Conduct Unbecoming: Gays and Lesbians in the U.S. Military* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1993), 11.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.; See also Allan Berube, *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War Two* (New York: Penguin Group, 1991).

<sup>11</sup> David F. Burrelli, "An Overview of the Debate on Homosexuals in the U.S. Military," *Gays and Lesbians in the Military: Issues, Concerns, and Contrasts*, ed. Wilbur J. Scott and Sandra Carson Stanley (New York: Aldine DeGruyter, 1994), 17-31.

military service. As Burrelli explains, however, homosexual behavior was taboo and considered appropriate grounds for disciplinary or administrative action. Burrelli describes the latitude military leaders had in dealing with suspected homosexuals: “although commanders had great discretion in the control and disciplining of their troops, specific laws, regulations, or policies addressing homosexuality did not exist.”<sup>12</sup>

Legal restrictions placed on homosexuals in the military were first instituted by the Articles of War of 1916, and then revised by the Articles of War of 1920. These Articles named sodomy as a specific offense. The 1921 Manual for Courts Martial specifically addresses sodomy. Finally, Article 125 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ), instituted in 1950, outlaws sodomy by all military members. The offense is defined as:

any person subject to this chapter who engages in unnatural carnal copulation with another person of the same or opposite sex or with an animal is guilty of sodomy. Penetration, however slight, is sufficient to complete the offense.<sup>13</sup>

Prior to World War II, members found guilty of sodomy were routinely imprisoned as punishment. Today, violations of the UCMJ are punishable by imprisonment in some cases, but administrative policies regarding homosexuals more frequently allow the member to be discharged from the service.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>13</sup> Uniform Code of Military Justice, Article 125, 1950.

In contrast to military law, military regulations and administrative policies regarding homosexuals have varied over the course of history. In an exhaustive study of the treatment of homosexual men and women service members during World War II, Allan Berube describes the rationale behind excluding homosexuals in the absence of a sodomy charge.<sup>14</sup> According to Berube, the emerging psychiatry profession became enmeshed in the military's policies on homosexual service members through recruit screening processes. Psychiatric screenings intended to exclude personnel likely to suffer emotional trauma, battle fatigue, and so on, were instituted in an effort to reduce administrative and medical costs when these individuals failed to perform well in military service. At the same time, the psychiatric profession's claim in the mid-twentieth century that homosexuality was a mental disorder spawned debate over whether imprisonment was an unusually harsh, and ineffective, punishment.

In the years following World War II, administrative practices regarding homosexuals shifted as the medical and psychiatric communities revised their formal opinions of homosexuality.<sup>15</sup> According to the General Accounting Office (GAO),

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<sup>14</sup> Berube, 128-148.

<sup>15</sup> Berrulli, 18.

The concept of homosexual orientation as a mental disorder was formally rejected by the psychiatric profession about 20 years ago. In 1973, the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from the list of mental illnesses after psychiatric, psychological, medical, and scientific evidence showed that it could not be considered a mental illness or a personality or psychopathological disorder. The Association's 1973 position on homosexuality and homosexuals in the military was that "homosexuality per se implies no impairment in judgment, stability, reliability, or general social or vocational capabilities."<sup>16</sup>

During the same timeframe, studies found no link between an individual's sexual preference and a likelihood to reveal classified information.<sup>17</sup> DOD's position regarding the homosexual issue remained one of exclusion, but the emphasis on unit cohesion became stronger as earlier arguments surrounding mental illness and security risks faded. Shilts describes the policy as shifting with the views of the times:

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<sup>16</sup> U.S. General Accounting Office, 36.

<sup>17</sup> "Report of the Board Appointed to Prepare and Submit Recommendations to the Secretary of the Navy for the Revision of Policies, Procedures and Directives Dealing with Homosexuals," 1957. This report is commonly called the Crittenden Report in reference to the Board's Chairman; "Nonconforming Sexual Orientations and Military Suitability," a draft report prepared by the Defense Personnel Security Research and Education Center (PERSEREC) in 1988.

From the start, the regulations--and rationale offered for them--were clearly designed to bend with the needs of the time. When the Army needed more men by the end of the war, for example, new edicts allowed for the military to retain 'reclaimable' homosexuals after an appropriate time of hospitalization. Though the policy remained the same over the years, the rationale for it changed to reflect prevailing attitudes. During the anti-Communist hysteria of the McCarthy era, for example, "national security" was advanced as the central reason for keeping gays out of government service. In more recent years, when the notion that gays are potential traitors has seemed less plausible, the most often articulated reason for excluding homosexuals from the military is that their presence would undermine the "good order, discipline and morale" of the fighting forces.<sup>18</sup>

Recent statements by DOD officials support Shilts' theory that the rationale behind the policy has changed. In 1991, Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney supported the exclusionary policy based on combat effectiveness, but called the security risk argument "a bit of an old chestnut."<sup>19</sup> DOD's response to the GAO report also reveals a change in rationale:

While it is true that the DOD has had an exclusionary policy on homosexuals serving in the Military since World War II . . . the DOD no longer bases its policy on any belief that homosexuality is a mental disorder. Stating that the current policy is a direct descendent of the World War II policy--which the GAO states was based, in part, on the belief that homosexuality was a mental disorder--could mislead readers into concluding that the current DOD policy is based on similar concerns . . . It is important that it be made clear that the current DOD policy is not based upon any considerations of mental disorders among homosexuals.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Shilts, 17.

<sup>19</sup> U.S. General Accounting Office, 35.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

This shift in rationale informally occurred during the 1970s when the wording “incompatible with military service” was introduced into the debate. During the Carter administration, DOD revised the policy to consider homosexuals eligible for discharge because of the alleged threat they posed to good order and discipline.<sup>21</sup> This policy change virtually eradicated the argument that homosexuals would be discharged for mental illness or security risk. In a sense, DOD did not have to support those arguments any longer because the new rationale--good order and discipline--was based on the “experienced judgment of senior military leaders.”<sup>22</sup> The formal change to the policy was implemented in the 1982 regulation with the wording “the presence in the military environment of persons who engage in homosexual conduct or who, by their statements, demonstrate a propensity to engage in homosexual conduct, seriously impairs the accomplishment of the military mission.”<sup>23</sup> This policy did not preclude disciplinary action or dishonorable discharges for homosexuals guilty of criminal behavior. According to Burrelli,

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<sup>21</sup> Burrelli, 18.

<sup>22</sup> U.S. General Accounting Office, 37.

<sup>23</sup> Department of Defense Directive 1332.14, January 28, 1982.

Generally speaking, when an individual was administratively discharged for homosexuality alone, an honorable or general discharge was issued. The type of discharge is based on the nature of the individual's service (i.e., behavior) while on duty. The directive listed those instances in which certain homosexual behaviors would result in a discharge "Under Other Than Honorable" conditions. These conditions included the use of force, homosexual acts with a minor, and fraternization deemed sufficiently disruptive to good order . . . . It is important to note than an individual could not receive a dishonorable or bad conduct discharge under these administrative regulations. These discharges can be affixed only by a court-martial and must be based on a finding of criminal acts.<sup>24</sup>

During the 1992 Presidential campaign, candidate Bill Clinton promised to lift the ban on homosexuals in the military if elected. Clinton was elected, and his announcement that he intended to pursue his campaign promise created political and media turmoil almost immediately following the election.<sup>25</sup> While the arguments surrounding gays in the military were not new to DOD, the issue had never been so openly dissected for the public. Tremendous opposition to lifting the ban by many senior military leaders created an atmosphere of drama for an issue that had previously gone largely unnoticed by the public. Clinton countered the opposition by stating that he did not intend to drastically alter the military's position. His intent, he said, was to discontinue discrimination based solely on an individual's admission of homosexuality. He did not foresee changing policy or laws that described behavior. "We know there have always been gays in the military," Clinton observed. "[The issue] is whether they can be in the military without lying about

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<sup>24</sup> Burrelli, 19.

<sup>25</sup> "New President Faces Gay-Soldiers Conflict" 1993 *Congressional Quarterly Almanac*, 454.

it, as long as there is a very strict code of conduct which, if they violate it, would lead to dismissal . . . or other appropriate sanctions.”<sup>26</sup> Ultimately, Clinton settled for slight modifications to the 1982 policy. The resulting policy was informally titled “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell, Don’t Pursue” (and shortened to “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell”) referring to DOD’s intention to refrain from actively seeking to determine if an applicant for enlistment or member of the military was homosexual, *and* the concurrent understanding that, if a member disclosed his or her sexual preference (either by verbal statement or actions), the member would be eligible for discharge.

### **C. INTERPRETING THE POLICY**

Interpretations of the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy and guidelines vary widely. In support of the exclusionary policy, Ronald Ray claims that “as far as the military is concerned, the open and the hidden homosexual are two very different persons: the former openly professes and practices homosexuality; the latter, for all practical purposes, is *not* homosexual.”<sup>27</sup> He postulates that “there is ample room for the homosexual who never lets his sexual behavior or orientation be known or otherwise interfere with military service. Allowing a homosexual to profess his homosexuality openly would adversely affect good order and discipline.”<sup>28</sup> According to Ray, if a homosexual abstains from any

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<sup>26</sup> Bill Clinton, Nov 16 News conference, as cited in “Roles for Women, Homosexuals Among Clinton’s First Tests,” *Congressional Quarterly* November 21, 1992, 3679.

<sup>27</sup> Ronald Ray, “Military Necessity and Homosexuality,” *Gays: In or Out? The U.S. Military and Homosexuals—A Sourcebook*, (New York: Brassey’s: 1993), 92. The author is a former colonel in the United States Marine Corps.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

type of homosexual behavior, he may successfully serve in the military. Ray claims that, if the homosexual "cannot control or govern his sexual behavior, he has no place in the military."<sup>29</sup>

Other views of the private nature of sexual preference are not as extreme as Ray's. In interviews with Army personnel just prior to "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," Laura Miller documented some much more tolerant opinions toward homosexual behavior.<sup>30</sup> According to one Army member, "What goes on behind closed doors is none of the military's business. As long as gays and lesbians keep their private lives out of the workplace, I foresee no problems."<sup>31</sup>

Research conducted at the Naval Postgraduate School shortly after "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" was implemented indicated that active duty Navy officers had only a weak understanding of the policy.<sup>32</sup> Surveys and interviews conducted by Cleveland and Ohl revealed that Navy officers attending the Navy's graduate program in Monterey, California did not fully understand the policy. A second research project at the Navy school revealed similar results two years later.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>30</sup> Laura Miller, "Fighting For a Just Cause," *Gays and Lesbians in the Military: Issues, Concerns, and Contrasts*, ed. Wilbur J. Scott and Sandra Carson Stanley (New York: Aldine DeGruyter, 1994).

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>32</sup> F. E. Cleveland and M. A. Ohl, "Don't Ask, Don't Tell -- Policy Analysis and Interpretation (Master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, 1994).

<sup>33</sup> Margaret R. Friery, "Trends in Navy Officer Attitudes Toward the 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' Policy (Master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, 1997).

### III. COHESION

Sociologists generally define unit cohesion as the degree to which individuals commit themselves to a group, and often describe cohesion using concepts such as motivation, satisfaction, mutual friendship, caring, interpersonal attraction, shared goals, teamwork, coordination, group pride, group prestige, and group status.<sup>34</sup>

This chapter presents several definitions of unit cohesion described by sociologists. Additionally, the chapter describes research indicating that effective leadership may be of primary importance in achieving and maintaining unit cohesion. Finally, a brief discussion of the definition used to discuss unit cohesion with the focus groups is presented. This chapter is intended to serve as a foundation for further discussion of homosexuals in the military. Specifically, one argument supporting exclusion of homosexuals from military service is that the presence of homosexuals in a military unit weakens unit cohesion. To fully explore this argument, an understanding of the unit cohesion concept is required.

#### A. COHESION DEFINED

At the end of World War II, Shils and Janowitz published an account of the successes and failures of German soldiers, detailing the importance and relevance of unit cohesion. Their work defines cohesion in terms of a soldier's "primary group,"

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<sup>34</sup> Robert MacCoun, *Sexual Orientation and Military Cohesion: A Critical Review of the Evidence*, as adapted from "Sexual Orientation and U.S. Military Personnel Policy" (RAND National Defense Research Institute, 1993), 3.

. . . characterized by intimate face-to-face association and cooperation . . . it is a “we”; it involves the sort of sympathy and mutual identification for which “we” is the natural expression. One lives in the feeling of the whole and finds the chief aims of his will in that feeling.<sup>35</sup>

Shils and Janowitz postulated that loyalty to the primary group delivers far more impact than common political, ideological, and cultural beliefs and experiences. This hypothesis was in conflict with a fairly romantic view of the time that a soldier’s belief in the political or religious “rightness” of a war would support morale and motivate troops to fight. Fighting for a righteous cause may have been viewed as an honorable attribute, but Shils and Janowitz’s research showed that soldiers were considerably more self-involved, focusing on closeness and communication with fellow group members, protectiveness of their immediate chain of command, and affection for the other individuals. According to their studies, factors outside this primary group--such as shared political, ideological, and cultural experiences--played only a minor role in unit cohesion.<sup>36</sup> In later work, Janowitz specifically defined cohesion as “the feeling of group solidarity and the capacity for collective action,” and termed it a function of loyalties that men develop toward each other.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Charles Horton Cooley, *Social Organization* (New York: 1909), 23-24, as cited by Edward A. Shils and Morris Janowitz, “Cohesion and Disintegration in the Wehrmacht in World War II,” *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Summer 1948, 280-315.

<sup>36</sup> Edward A. Shils and Morris Janowitz, “Cohesion and Disintegration in the Wehrmacht in World War II,” *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Summer 1948, 280-315.

<sup>37</sup> Morris Janowitz, *Military Institutions and Coercion in the Developing Nations* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964), 143.

Another classic work published after World War II, *The American Soldier*, by Stouffer et al., reported that

... group loyalty was paramount in high-performing units, which were defined as units with low rates of nonbattle casualties. These units were those in which the men developed bonds of loyalty to the group; had favorable attitudes toward the officers; trusted in the medical care they would receive in battle; and had pride in the unit's accomplishments.<sup>38</sup>

Early assessments of cohesion by Stouffer et al., Shils and Janowitz, and others generally agreed that the most successful fighting force is comprised of men who consider themselves buddies. These works paved the way for later research on unit cohesion.

Henderson attributes cohesion to a condition where primary day-to-day goals of the soldier, the small group the soldier is a member of, and the small group's leaders "are congruent--with each giving his primary loyalty to the group so that it trains and fights as a unit with all members willing to risk death to achieve a common objective."<sup>39</sup> He describes cohesion in terms of a set of rules, or "core soldier values," that ultimately shape the behavior of individual soldiers:

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<sup>38</sup> Nora Kinzer Stewart, *Mates and Muchachos: Unit Cohesion in the Falklands/Malvinas War* (Washington: Brassey's Inc., 1991), 13.

<sup>39</sup> William Darryl Henderson, *Cohesion: The Human Element in Combat* (Washington: National Defense University Press, 1985), 4.

Over time these rules form expectations among the members of a unit about their individual conduct and in a strongly cohesive unit they become the primary determinant of the soldier's behavior, especially in the danger, uncertainty, stress, and confusion of modern war.<sup>40</sup>

Johns et al. define military cohesion as "the bonding together of members of a unit or organization in such a way as to sustain their will and commitment to each other, their unit, and the mission."<sup>41</sup> Like Henderson, Johns and his colleagues stress the importance of shared values and attitudes between the individual and the group. As the authors observe, "evidence indicates that similar values, interests, attitudes, and beliefs that are important to the members of a group usually heighten attraction."<sup>42</sup>

Contemporary research regarding unit cohesion builds on the notion that the primary group and the soldier's personal interests outweigh any higher level of devotion to country and duty. For example, following her research of unit cohesion among British troops and among Argentine troops during the Falklands War, Stewart writes that the "belonging or bonding to the group and the individual's bonding to the goals of the society as a whole are intrinsic elements of military cohesion."<sup>43</sup> Her main premise is that a soldier's trust in his buddies' capabilities and trust in his leader's competency is at the

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<sup>40</sup>Henderson, *The Hollow Army: How the U.S. Army is Oversold and Undermanned* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), 108.

<sup>41</sup> John H. Johns et al., *Cohesion in the US Military: Defense Management Study Group on Military Cohesion* (Washington: National Defense University Press, 1984), 4.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* 33.

<sup>43</sup> Stewart, 18.

heart of cohesion and at the heart of combat effectiveness. Moskos studied soldiers during the Vietnam conflict and determined that “combat motivation arises out of the linkages between individual self-concern, primary-group processes, and the shared beliefs of soldiers.”<sup>44</sup> He likewise determined that successful soldiering was not an outcrop of shared political or ethical views, but did include a soldier’s general belief in the worthwhileness of American society. His research showed that the soldier’s ultimate standard rests on keeping alive.<sup>45</sup> As Moskos writes:

An individual’s survival is directly related to the support--moral, physical, and technical--he can expect from his fellow soldiers. He gets such support largely to the degree that he reciprocates to the others in his group in general, and to his buddy in particular.<sup>46</sup>

Moskos further describes cohesion in simple terms of survival:

One can view primary-group processes in the combat situation as a kind of rudimentary social contract; a contract which is entered into because of advantages to individual self interests.<sup>47</sup>

The failed rescue of Americans held hostage in Iran in 1980 led to an increased emphasis on the importance of unit cohesion within the U.S. Military Special Operations

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<sup>44</sup> Charles C. Moskos, *The American Enlisted Man: The Rank and File in Today's Military* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1970), 135.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 155.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 145.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 156.

Forces. McDonald claims that study of the rescue mission indicates the importance of unit members “knowing” their teammates in terms of technical proficiency and capabilities, as well as understanding each other’s beliefs. In his discussion, McDonald cites the definition of cohesion in the Army Field Manual (FM) 22-100, Military Leadership, as “the existence of strong bonds of mutual trust, confidence and understanding among members of a unit.” He also cites the Air Force Manual (AFM) 1-1, Basic Aerospace Doctrine of the United States Air Force definition of cohesion as “the cement that holds a unit together through the trials of combat.”<sup>48</sup>

In a study of unit cohesion within industrial work groups, Klein defines cohesion as “the extent to which psychological forces operate to bind people together in a common purpose.”<sup>49</sup> MacCoun further defines unit cohesion as falling within two types or categories: social cohesion, and task cohesion.<sup>50</sup> As MacCoun writes:

Social cohesion refers to the nature and quality of the emotional bonds of friendship, liking, caring, and closeness among group members. A group is socially cohesive to the extent that its members like each other, prefer to spend their social time together, enjoy each other’s company, and feel emotionally close to one another.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Ralph E. McDonald, *Cohesion: The Key to Special Operations Teamwork* (Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: Air University Press, 1994), 1.

<sup>49</sup> Stuart M. Klein, *Workers Under Stress: The Impact of Work Pressure on Group Cohesion* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1971), 7.

<sup>50</sup> MacCoun, 4.

<sup>51</sup> MacCoun, 4.

This definition of social cohesion implies that the factors described by Henderson, Johns et al., Stewart, and other researchers--shared values, beliefs and affection for one another--are of primary importance. But, MacCoun claims that the type of cohesion most closely related to unit performance is task cohesion, or,

the shared commitment among members to achieving a goal that requires the collective efforts of the group. A group with high task cohesion is composed of members who share a common goal and who are motivated to coordinate their efforts as a team to achieve that goal.<sup>52</sup>

Again, this definition shares some aspects of the definitions discussed earlier, but focuses primarily on the group's goal, without reference to any sense of close friendship among group members.

One additional definition of unit cohesion comes from a former military leader who is involved in current military policy debate. According to John Glenn, a senator (Ohio), former Marine, and astronaut, "unit cohesion means, 'Will you risk your life for me?' and vice versa."<sup>53</sup>

## **B. LEADERSHIP ROLE IN COHESION**

Throughout the literature on cohesion, the concept of effective leadership is consistently cited as a primary factor in establishing and maintaining a high level of

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<sup>52</sup> MacCoun, 4.

<sup>53</sup> *Congressional Quarterly*, Feb 6, 1993, 273.

cohesion. Johns calls it “the most critical element in achieving cohesive, effective organizations.”<sup>54</sup> He refers to a comparative analysis of organizations:

A central finding of the comparative analysis of organizations is that organizations which differ in the kinds of control they use, and in the alienation or commitment they elicit, also differ in their organizational structure in many significant respects. *Foremost among these structural differences are those of the place and role of leadership.* (emphasis added)<sup>55</sup>

Janowitz also describes tasks and objectives normally associated with effective leadership:

Social cohesion in the military requires effective procedures for assimilating new personnel, meaningful authority and sanction systems, allocation of equitable rewards and promotions, and a sense of organizational purpose.<sup>56</sup>

Henderson writes that leadership is a vital role. He describes a phenomenon in which effective leadership essentially persuades the individual to overlook his or her own interests and pursue, instead, the goals of the organization.<sup>57</sup> He claims that the unit develops “a set of core soldier values” through effective leadership:

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<sup>54</sup> Johns et al., 161.

<sup>55</sup> Amiti Etzioni, *Modern Organizations* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1964) as cited in Johns et al., 161.

<sup>56</sup> Janowitz, *Military Institutions*, 146.

<sup>57</sup> Henderson, *The Human Element*, 111.

*In a unit with strong leadership*, all other influences on the soldier's behavior become secondary and the soldier adheres to a set of core soldier values. Such core values are common in any first-rate army. Fighting skill, professional teamwork, physical stamina, self-discipline, duty (selfless service), respect for unit leaders (both professionally and personally), and loyalty to unit are core soldier values common to all first-rate armies. (emphasis added)<sup>58</sup>

Henderson's description of a unit with strong leadership indicates that a leader should be able to focus the group on specific, mission-oriented goals rather than on other influences such as shared backgrounds, religious beliefs, political ideology, and so on. Using sociological terms, Henderson's description implies that the actions of the leader could determine whether a group developed task cohesion (focusing on the mission) or social cohesion (focusing on friendships between group members).

In a research project developing a generalized model for the development of cohesion, Braun originally included a variable called "supervisor credibility," which he defined as effective leadership. His premise was that several variables contributed to overall cohesion, and that a low level of one variable could be accommodated by a high level of another variable. Following his analysis, Braun revised his model. He still considered leadership a variable, but one that could not afford to fall to a low level. His claim was that, regardless of the level of the other variables, without effective leadership, unit cohesion could not be achieved or maintained.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Henderson, *The Hollow Army*, 108.

<sup>59</sup> Daniel G. Braun, "Cohesion: A New Perspective" (Master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, 1983), 82.

Chapter IV fully discusses the results of the focus group interviews conducted as part of this study. Briefly, though, while the group members could not succinctly define the importance of leadership in achieving and maintaining unit cohesion, they strongly agreed that it is paramount.

### **C. COHESION AND “DON’T ASK, DON’T TELL”**

The military’s policy excluding homosexuals is based on the assertion by military officials that homosexuality is incompatible with military service. This view is supported by “the considered judgment of military professionals and civilian policymakers serving in various leadership positions throughout DOD and the services.” The military’s policy also reflects a commonly held concern about the effect of homosexuality on overall discipline, good order, morale, and combat effectiveness.<sup>60</sup>

Although DOD has not conducted research regarding the effect that known homosexuals exert upon a group, the reference to good order and discipline implies a concern for task cohesion. Likewise, the reference to morale implies a concern for social cohesion. Studies by Henderson, Johns, Shils and Janowitz, Moskos, and others, briefly described above, all indicate that a link exists between unit cohesion and combat effectiveness. The concern for unit cohesion demonstrated by DOD, then, appears to be based on a conclusion that weak cohesion is likely to result in less effectiveness.

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<sup>60</sup> U.S. General Accounting Office, 27.

In 1993, when President Clinton announced his plan to lift the ban excluding homosexuals from military service, opponents cited a number of reasons the ban should remain in place: decreased unit cohesion, increased security risks, privacy issues, medical costs associated with HIV and AIDS, deployability of HIV-infected members, threat to the blood supply, combat effectiveness of homosexuals, moral standards, threat to retention and recruiting, public opinion, and biblical pronouncements. Although many of these issues are still raised in discussions concerning the military's policy on homosexuals, Moskos has succinctly narrowed the debate to just three issues: combat effectiveness, privacy, and unit cohesion.<sup>61</sup>

DOD officials have said that the policy has not been based on, nor is it likely to be changed as a result of, scientific or empirical evidence, preferring to rely on the first-hand experience of military leaders. Indeed, in an official response to a General Accounting Officer (GAO) report, DOD observed that "military judgments about overall combat effectiveness are inherently subjective in nature, and . . . scientific or sociological analyses are unlikely to ever be dispositive."<sup>62</sup>

This stance gives the military tremendous latitude in determining policy, and it has been upheld by the American court system.<sup>63</sup> As Petry-Wells writes:

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<sup>61</sup> Moskos appeared on CSPAN in September 1996 and specifically labeled these three issues as the core of the debate over homosexuals in the military.

<sup>62</sup> U.S. General Accounting Office, 56.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

The Secretary [of Defense] need not determine whether homosexuality is absolutely incompatible with military service, somewhat incompatible, or so on. The determination simply states the problem: homosexuality is incompatible with military service. The exclusion policy states the solution to that problem, arrived at by the . . . senior military and civilian leadership.<sup>64</sup>

It seems reasonable that military leaders should, at the very least, be aware of data regarding the issue, even if they are not bound to accept the data as a grounds for policy development. Further, even if DOD officials are not required to formally define and defend the assumption that homosexuality is “incompatible with military service,” they should at least be prepared to discuss the issue using more than the emotional responses of some senior leaders. The present research attempts to help fill the existing gap in knowledge linking policies on homosexuals with unit cohesion. Information gathered through focus group interviews can then be used by military leaders in forming their opinions about the issue.

Homosexuals have been formally excluded from military service since prior to World War II and the emergence of psychiatric screening for enlistees. Chapter II reviewed the history of the exclusionary policies regarding homosexuals; but, to determine why “cohesion” is at the heart of the debate today, it is only necessary to explain that DOD no longer considers some of its earliest assessments of homosexuals as major factors. As DOD observes:

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<sup>64</sup> Petry-Wells, 54.

The DOD policy is not based on any belief that homosexuality is a mental disorder, nor is it based solely on security concerns. Rather, the DOD policy is based on concerns about the effects that homosexuality, that is sexual desire or behavior directed toward a member of one's own sex, has in the Military environment. It continues to be the Department of Defense policy that the presence in the Military environment of persons who engage in homosexual conduct or who, by their statements, demonstrate a propensity to engage in homosexual conduct, seriously impairs the accomplishment of the Military mission.<sup>65</sup>

#### **D. THE DEFINITION OF COHESION USED IN THIS STUDY**

In discussing cohesion with active duty Navy officers in the focus group interviews, researchers relied on Johns' definition of cohesion as "the bonding together of members of a unit or organization in such a way as to sustain their will and commitment to each other, their unit, and the mission."<sup>66</sup> This definition captures the elements of task cohesion and social cohesion. In addition, it is written in military terms, referring to units and missions without being too specific. For instance, most of the focus group participants were never in combat, facing death at the hands of a military enemy. Johns' definition was considered broad enough to fit the frame of reference of most group participants. It is also worded in such a way as to allow various interpretations. Since the researchers were interested in learning what Navy officers considered important about cohesion and the homosexuality issue, no attempt was made to overly define the concept of cohesion.

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<sup>65</sup> U.S. General Accounting Office, 57.

<sup>66</sup> Johns et al., 4.

Once the researchers stated Johns' definition, they did not refer back to it during group discussion. The intent was to discover what the group thought about cohesion, not to train them in military definitions of sociological or psychological concepts.

Chapter IV contains an in-depth analysis of the interviews; but, of interest for this discussion of cohesion is the definition informally constructed by the groups. Overwhelmingly, the participants in the focus group interviews viewed cohesion as a level of comfort among unit members, and they spoke of factors related to social cohesion. When specifically questioned about factors related to task cohesion--that is, competence or the ability to accomplish the group's formal goals--the discussion usually reverted back to social cohesion concepts.

Interestingly, when the researchers were originally exploring the link between cohesion and the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy, they conducted a group discussion with active duty Navy officers (and two Army officers from allied nations), enrolled in a Military Sociology and Psychology course at the Naval Postgraduate School. The participants had already participated in discussions on diversity, representation, and discrimination. During this group discussion, the officers generally agreed that unit members did not have to be "friends" to have a successful unit. These officers used terms such as "competent," "good at a job," and "honest," to describe personal attributes related to high unit cohesion. These terms are closely associated with task cohesion.

In contrast, officers participating in the focus groups were probably more representative of the general Navy officer population with respect to their awareness of military sociology issues. They used terms such as "common values," "common

backgrounds,” and “friendship” to describe elements of cohesion. These terms are more reflective of social cohesion.



#### **IV. SCOPE AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Defense policy makers have been forced to rely on contradictory, anecdotal evidence regarding the military service of homosexuals and unit cohesion. Empirical evidence is not likely to be available, because the military has officially excluded homosexuals for more than fifty years.

DOD officials maintain that military leaders have adequately determined through experience that known homosexuals pose a serious threat to good order and discipline. This judgment has been made, however, during a time when certain aspects of military life may predispose such a judgment. For instance, military personnel are told through written regulation and cultural norms that homosexuals pose a threat to a unit's mission; individuals discovered to be homosexual are in violation of rules and regulations designed to preserve good order and discipline and are routinely discharged; homosexual service members who do not disclose their sexual orientation are not able to show that their sexual orientation does, or does not, affect unit cohesion; and, heterosexual service members do not often work with known homosexuals (since homosexuals are discharged), so they are not likely to have experience with homosexuals and unit cohesion.

This thesis seeks to discover whether the presence of known homosexuals in the military has an effect on unit cohesion, based on the attitudes, opinions and experiences of Navy officers. It is an attempt to determine whether there is a connection between unit cohesion and homosexuality, without deferring to the military's use of regulations to

exclude homosexuals. DOD states that homosexuality is “incompatible with military service”; but “incompatibility” is defined mainly as the discomfort caused to others by homosexuals who serve in the military. By describing why service members are presumably uncomfortable serving with homosexuals, DOD can better assess the homosexual issue. And, by determining the nature of the link between sexual preference and unit cohesion, military policy makers can better articulate the policy.

#### **A. FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS**

The researchers used focus group interviews to gather qualitative data regarding attitudes and opinions about unit cohesion and homosexuality. The use of focus groups was intended to gather a wide range of opinions as opposed to limiting responses to a written survey or closely structured interview. The intent was to allow the focus group participants to express their views openly and freely, rather than simply responding to points suggested by the researchers. During the interviews, the participants conversed with each other. The researchers guided the discussion, but did not strictly control it.

#### **B. FOCUS GROUP COMPOSITION**

Focus group participants for this study were Navy officers attending the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California during October and November, 1996. Although officers representing other branches of the US military attend the Naval Postgraduate School, the researchers elected to limit the focus groups to Navy officers to avoid inconsistencies about service cultures.

The researchers contacted approximately 500 Navy officers, randomly selected by the school's Registrar's Office, and invited them to participate in the focus group interviews. Ultimately, 30 Navy officers agreed to participate in the discussions. The researchers conducted seven focus group interviews, with between two and five Navy officers in each group.

### **C. CONDUCTING THE FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS**

Prior to the interviews, the participants were told only that the discussion would address unit cohesion and the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy. Once the interview began, the researchers provided a brief definition of unit cohesion and defined terms referred to in military regulations regarding homosexuals. Appendix A contains the protocol followed by the researchers.

The focus group interviews were conducted on the Naval Postgraduate School campus. Each interview lasted approximately two hours. An audio recording was made of each interview. These recordings were subsequently transcribed. Appendix B presents a representative transcript. The participants were promised complete anonymity. Thus, all names and other identifying information were deleted from the transcripts.

Two researchers were present at the interviews to ensure objectivity and to adequately control the discussion. The author primarily directed the interview discussion and was assisted by a secondary researcher who monitored the group's reaction to the discussion. This method allowed the primary researcher to focus attention on group members as they spoke, while the second researcher focused on the reaction of the rest of

the group. The qualitative data gathered in the interviews was also used to support a research project by the second researcher regarding Navy officers' understanding of the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy.<sup>67</sup>

No attempt was made to encourage the interview participants to agree with other, or to alter their opinions. Following the interviews, the researchers conducted a thematic analysis to discover trends in the officers' discussions. Chapter V presents an analysis of the interviews in aggregate form.

The researchers did not attempt to select the participants based on demographic data. Demographic and attitudinal data were collected, however, through a written survey to evaluate the diversity of the group. The survey is contained in Appendix C. As shown in Table 1, focus group participants represented a wide range of Navy officers.

**Table 1. Demographic Description of Focus Group Participants (n=30)**

<u>Gender</u>		<u>Navy community</u>	
Men	18	Surface	6
Women	12	Aviation	5
		Submarine	1
		Fleet Support	10
<u>Race/Ethnicity</u>			
White	25	Supply	1
Black	3	Other	7
Hispanic	1		
Other	1		
<u>Years of Naval service</u>		<u>Friend or relative is a known homosexual</u>	
1-6 years	2	Yes	20
7-10 years	16	No	9
11-16 years	12	Don't Know	1

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

Since participation in the group interviews was voluntary, the researchers felt there was a danger that most participants would hold extremely negative or extremely positive views regarding homosexuals or the military's homosexual policies. The survey questions were intended to determine whether the interview data were skewed, based on participant self-selectivity. The participants were requested to respond to very general statements regarding homosexuality and military service. Answers were made on a scale of one to ten correlating to whether the respondent disagreed or agreed with the statements.

The survey results demonstrate that attitudes held by the interview participants were diverse and broad-ranging. For example, Figure 1 indicates that participants display a wide range of satisfaction with the current policy when asked to judge the statement "On the whole, I like the 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' policy better than the previous policy." Four participants responded that they strongly disagreed with the statement, while the greatest number (6) indicated that they mildly favored the current policy. Only one participant strongly agreed with the statement. The remaining responses were somewhat evenly distributed throughout the scale.

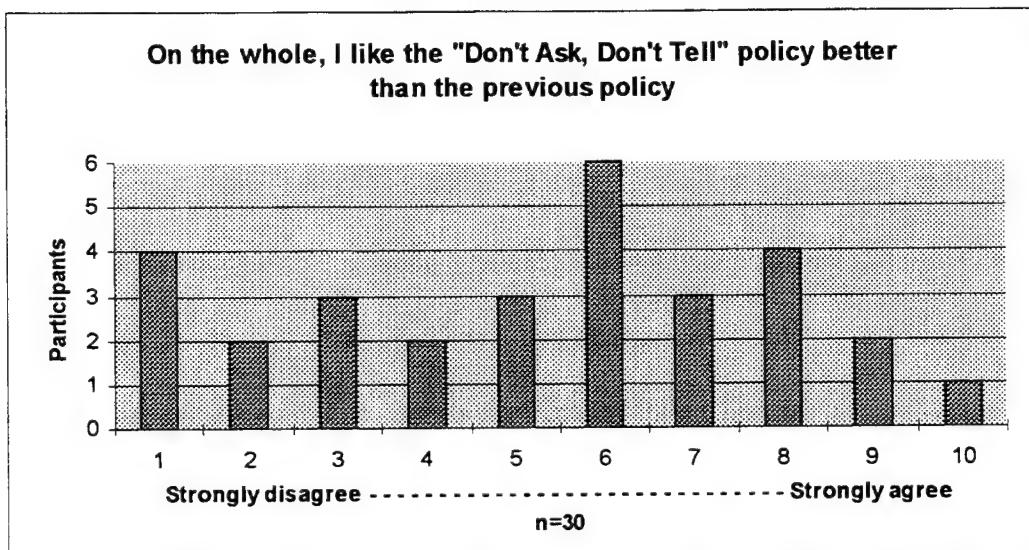


Figure 1

As seen in Figure 2, the participants viewed themselves as having varying degrees of tolerance toward homosexuals when compared with their peers; however, the majority still described themselves as relatively more tolerant than their fellow officers.

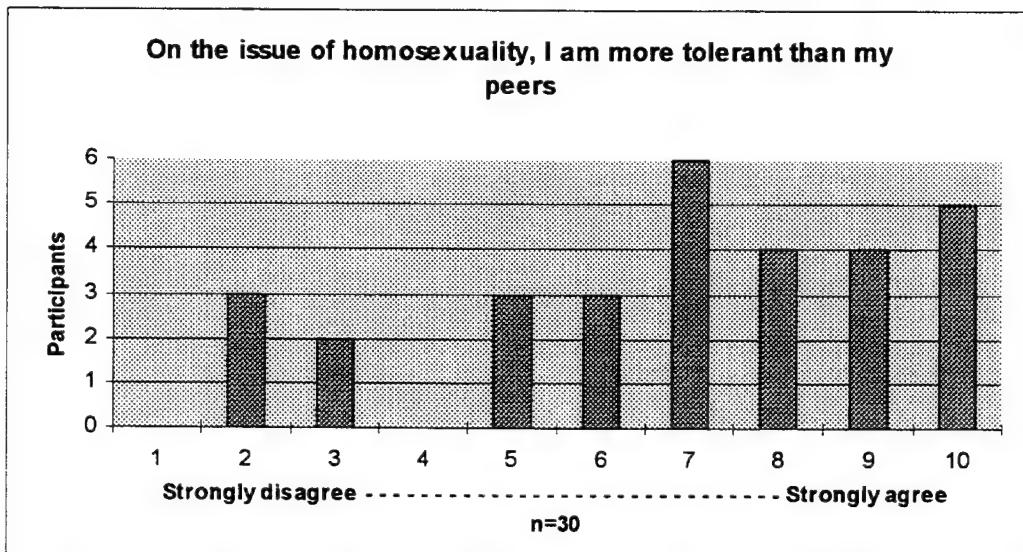


Figure 2

This overall level of tolerance did not support particularly strong agreement among participants when they were asked if they thought homosexuals can cause the downfall of good order and discipline (Figure 3), or if the presence of a homosexual in a unit would interfere with unit accomplishment (Figure 4). The participants may have judged the impact that homosexuals would have on unit discipline and mission using their perceptions of the Navy population at large's tolerance of homosexuals, which they believed was less than their own.

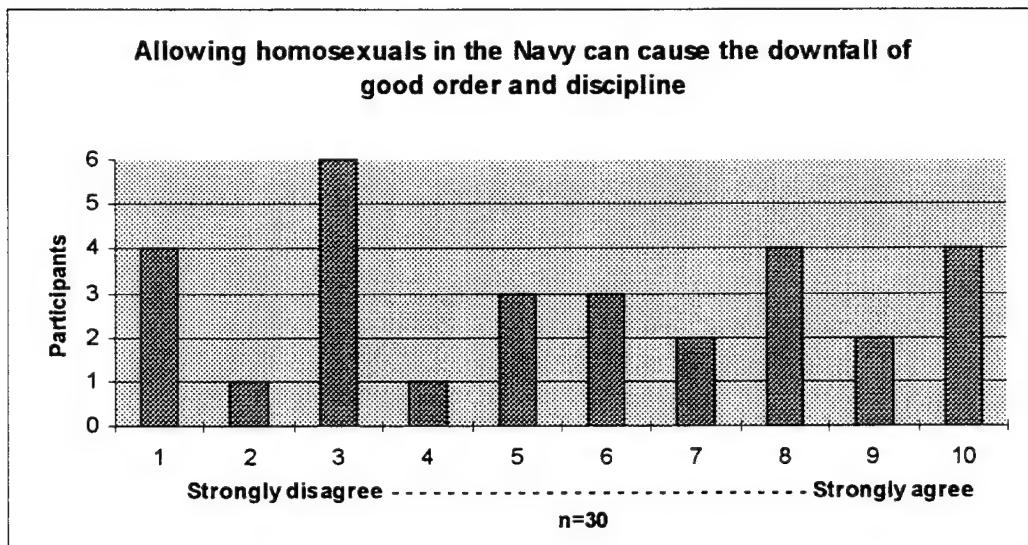


Figure 3

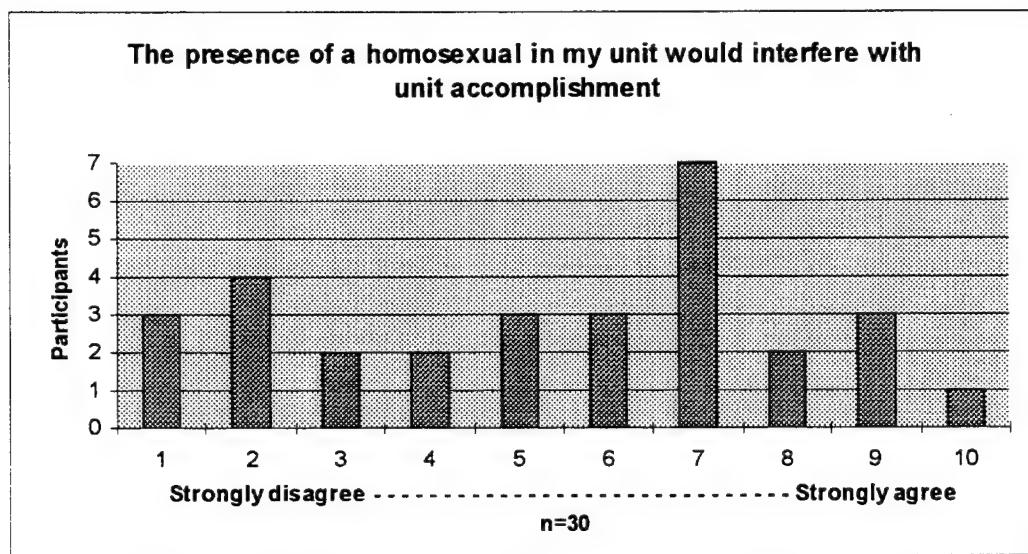


Figure 4

Figure 5 indicates a wide range of opinions regarding the privacy afforded to heterosexuals when homosexuals are assigned to Naval vessels. In fact, the survey response shows that less than half the respondents tended to agree that invasion of privacy

is a major issue under the military's current policy. However, during the focus group interviews as discussed in Chapter V, the privacy issue was raised more often than any other issue when discussing reasons that heterosexuals would feel uncomfortable with homosexuals aboard ships.

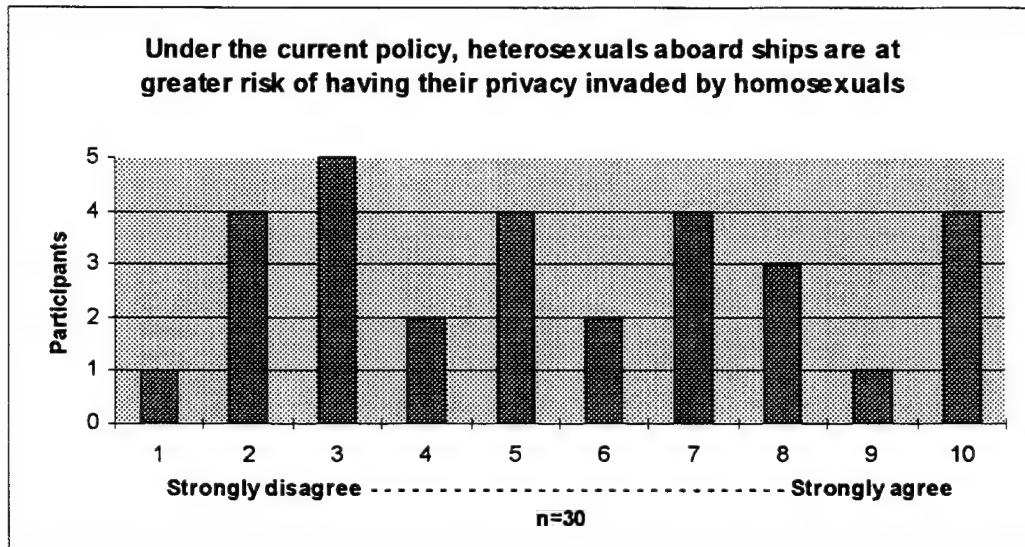


Figure 5

No attempt was made to correlate demographic variables to general opinions and attitudes. The surveys were not intended to reflect trends in Navy officer opinions and attitudes; they were merely used as an instrument to assess group diversity. Research correlating demographics to opinions of Navy officers regarding the military's homosexual policies has been conducted in other studies.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.; Cleveland and Ohl.

Results of the focus group interviews are not intended to be generalized to the Navy at large; the sample size and demographic representation are not statistically representative of the Navy population. The researchers feel, however, that the attitudes and opinions expressed by the focus group participants are appropriate starting points for further qualitative or quantitative research.

## V. FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW RESULTS

The researchers sought to determine whether Navy officers participating in the focus group interviews believed that homosexuals assigned to a military unit would adversely affect unit cohesion. As discussed in Chapter III, the researchers used a definition of unit cohesion developed by Johns' et al. to initiate discussion. This definition broadly defines unit cohesion as "the bonding together of members of a unit or organization in such a way as to sustain their will and commitment to each other, their unit, and the mission."<sup>69</sup> The officers in the focus groups were asked to describe what organizational factors would facilitate unit cohesion and whether the presence of a homosexual in the unit would affect unit cohesion.

The initial portion of the interviews focused on the factors that group participants considered important to unit cohesion. A thematic analysis resulted in six factors: leadership; trust; common values; shared experiences; common goals; and appropriate behavior. The remainder of each interview focused on specific details regarding why the participants believed that homosexuals would, or would not, disrupt these factors. The researchers considered this second portion of the interviews to be the most important aspect of the research project. The opinions presented by the focus group participants were wide ranging. They indicate that the expressed opinion of military leaders that

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<sup>69</sup> Johns et al., 4.

homosexuals disrupt unit cohesion should be more closely evaluated regarding specific factors of unit cohesion.

This chapter is an analysis of the interviews in aggregate form. The six factors identified through the thematic analysis are presented. Other aspects considered important by the interview participants, but not identified as unit cohesion factors, are also discussed. Additionally, the author constructed a rudimentary unit cohesion model based on the comments gathered in the interviews. This model supports the general concepts of cohesion as defined by the focus groups. However, the model fails to hold together when unit members are not all presumed to be heterosexual.

#### **A. FACTORS RELATED TO UNIT COHESION**

The interview participants were asked to discuss elements they considered important for achieving or maintaining unit cohesion. The responses reflected many aspects of the sociological definitions of unit cohesion described in Chapter III; and the definitions tended to vary between task cohesion and social cohesion. This section describes the elements of a unit that the interview participants generally believed contribute to unit cohesion, and how they believed homosexuality relates to these elements. Interestingly, the officers could not always clearly describe how homosexuality would be linked to the elements of unit cohesion. In fact, many of the officers appeared to define unit cohesion in the absence of any homosexuals assigned to the unit, and assumed that inclusion of a homosexual, regardless of his or her relationship to the factors, would disrupt cohesion within the unit. For instance, the officers often identified shared

experiences as a factor important to unit cohesion, and they pointed to group training, boot camp, unit exercises and so on, as examples. However, many officers did not generally relate a homosexual's participation in shared experiences to a strengthening of unit cohesion. Their view appears to be that, even if a homosexual participates in group experiences such as training or exercises, the homosexual would adversely affect unit cohesion.

### **1. Leadership**

In general, the officers agreed that leadership is a key element in achieving and maintaining unit cohesion. Credit was given to individuals in leadership positions at various levels of a command for initiating respectful behavior between unit members and establishing harmony within the group. The commanding officer and other senior officers were often cited as having the biggest influence on the culture of a command. One officer described this element as a measure of respect the senior leaders afforded the unit members:

Command cohesiveness is affected by the command leadership . . . I think if you've got good leadership, and if they are respectful of individuals, you'll have unit cohesiveness. But if you have leadership that verbally, or even by their actions, is saying that they can't stand this policy or this type of individual, you're not going to see that cohesiveness in a unit. So I think leadership has a lot to do with it.

Senior enlisted members and enlisted members assigned as work center supervisors were also credited with influencing the attitudes, and subsequent behavior, of junior

enlisted members. Some of the focus group participants suggested that the attitudes of commanding officers filtered throughout the command and shaped the attitudes and behavior of junior command members. Other focus group participants saw a definite distinction between attitudes and behavior. They generally agreed that the senior command leadership established boundaries for acceptable behavior, but they argued that attitudes and values among the junior troops were developed and nurtured by peer group or immediate supervisors. Their viewpoint was that, although senior leadership may mandate behavior, it could not mandate attitudes and values.

The theme of senior leadership setting the culture of a unit and thereby affecting unit cohesion was echoed by several of the focus group participants. One officer described a command he had been assigned to when an enlisted member admitted to homosexual activity:

The way that particular command functioned was very much dependent on the relationship between the Captain, XO, and the department heads. And that had a lot more effect on how the ship functioned as a whole, than did any single personality.

A common aspect of the leadership discussion was a belief that the leader's role in maintaining cohesion included upholding military regulations to protect the comfort of the majority. Thus, a leader was expected to make command decisions regarding unit cohesion based on the expected reaction of the majority of the unit. For instance, the officers believed that if an exclusionary regulation were in place to protect the comfort of the majority, the leader had an obligation to abide by that regulation. An officer assigned

to a training squadron described a dilemma that he saw his command leadership address when several members of the squadron refused to fly with a homosexual:

They kind of approached it from the staunch perspective of, "This person belongs here and you will fly with him." And then that broke down to, "Well, we've got to deal with the people who won't fly with him." They tried to create a culture that was supportive of the [homosexual], but then that broke down into trying to appease everybody . . . It depends how large the group is that is refusing to associate with the homosexual. If you have an entire group that refuses to associate with one person, you're at risk of losing the entire unit. Then the CO would have to balance the whole unit falling apart against one person benefiting.

Although only a few of the officers were willing to suggest that known homosexuals will be allowed to serve in the military in the future, those who did, adamantly laid the responsibility for unit cohesion on senior leadership. They described the transition from exclusion to admittance as one in which leadership "forces tolerance" and compared it to the military's historical treatment of blacks and women:

When people were very much against integrating the races, or the gender issue--I had guys who would say they would never serve with women on ship. When it comes right down to it and you're faced with the decision--work with women or go find another job. That was my answer to them. Either you get over it, or get out. It's your choice, but this is going to happen regardless. And I think the homosexual issue is the same way. And if they change the policy tomorrow, we'd all be out there putting the program together to say okay, we now will be tolerant. And you'll learn to be tolerant, and then it'll be over with. We do what we're directed to do. We don't have to believe in it.

Following this "forced tolerance," which was expected to effect tolerant behavior but not necessarily alter attitudes, these officers suggested that heterosexual service

members would gradually see that sexual preference has little to do with a person's ability to serve in the military. Their opinion reflects the "contact theory"<sup>70</sup> suggesting that much of the opposition to homosexuals stems from individuals who have not experienced any kind of positive working relationship or friendship with a known homosexual. This argument speculates that, as heterosexual military members work side-by-side with homosexual military members, they will eventually be able to "define" the homosexual much as they do heterosexual service members--for example, as a person with skills, talents, values, and so on, without limiting the definition to sexual preference. However, some of the officers believed that, since homosexual service members are routinely discharged under current policy, a strengthened unit cohesion based on the "contact theory" would not result unless senior policy makers revise the policy.

On a more personal level of leadership discussion, the Navy officers talked about their own role in unit cohesion as affected by homosexuals assigned to a unit. One officer who had been in command of a 45-member unit, claimed that the command experienced no adverse effects of having homosexuals assigned to the unit. She added, however, that the military's regulations regarding homosexuality hampered her ability to create an environment she considered conducive to unit cohesion:

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<sup>70</sup> Theodore R. Sarbin, *The Deconstruction of Stereotypes: Homosexuals and Military Policy* (Monterey: PERSEREC, 1994) 20.

I had a command, and several people in my command were known by others in the command, or were thought to be, homosexual--it was never really stated. It didn't impact unit cohesion at all. In fact, the only thing that I would say, in the policy, that affected unit cohesion was those people were unable to be honest with me Monday morning when I would ask how their weekend was . . . . [the policy] bred a dishonesty that is not compatible with what we try to hold up as some of our three core values. That's the part that bothers me more than anything . . . . It was pretty clear to a lot of people in my command that, in fact, they were homosexuals . . . . But, they were all friends, and they were all good people, and it didn't affect our work at all.

This officer attributed the cohesion within the group, even with suspected homosexuals, to the character of the people and to her own leadership style, which she believed demonstrated respect for an individual regardless of sexual preference. Later in the interview, she discussed the atmosphere at the same command after one of the members admitted to being homosexual and was discharged:

I can only tell you that there a was great sorrow and sadness at the command for losing this top sailor who was a wonderful person with a great personality . . . . Just a huge loss and a sorrow. And if there was any kind of cohesion affected, it was that they all drew closer by feeling the loss . . . . I think that if I would have been the type of officer-in-charge who was really against gays, I think that could have had a very tremendous impact on my PSD. When that person came to me and said, "I'm gay," if I would have responded to him saying, "You're out of here. I want you transferred to a different command"--Had I set that tone in my PSD, I can't help but believe that my PSD would have responded that way. Not only against him, but against the others who were supposedly gay. By not doing that, and by actually talking to the individual, I actually found that the support came to him that he needed.

Not all of the officers were able to view their role as leaders as having such an impact on the acceptance or rejection of known or suspected homosexuals in their work

centers. They saw themselves as reacting to a policy that may be in conflict with the beliefs of many unit members. Rather than viewing their own actions as shaping attitudes and behaviors, many of the interview participants equated the issue to an “added burden” for leaders already faced with leadership and management challenges. One officer said, “We’ve got enough to try to manage to get our job done. [Exclusion] might be the easiest way to facilitate leadership getting the work done.” This view was less reflective of a leader building unit cohesion, and more reflective of a manager trying to maintain order under difficult conditions:

We’re the ones who usually have to deal with the different consequences. We’re the department heads--we have to deal with the problems that happen. And nobody really wants any more problems . . . . [Homosexuality] is a problem. And I don’t think people want more problems.

The “different consequences” referred to as causing additional problems for leaders included sexual harassment by homosexuals, threats or actual violence against homosexuals, fraternization, and so on. These issues are addressed below in this chapter.

Virtually all of the discussion addressing leader’s role in unit cohesion was based on the assumption that the leaders are heterosexual. In fact, few of the officers in these focus groups thought that they had ever worked for a homosexual boss. Their discussion of whether a homosexual could effectively assume a leadership role in a military environment is discussed below.

## 2. Trust

A crucial element of unit cohesion identified by the focus groups was a "sense of trust" among unit members:

We're people going out to do our job, and that job may get us killed. And because of that, and the dangers that are involved--the high-risk nature--you have to be able to depend on everybody around you to do their job completely and without a doubt. If you're spending any time worrying about whether this guy can do his job, whether this guy is going to . . . if you don't trust him, period, it's going to affect the way you do your job.

In some cases, the officers described the unit in terms of sports metaphors and implied that a trust in fellow teammates would improve teamwork. The question of trust took on even greater significance for these individuals when they equated effective teamwork to life and death situations:

If you're going to be a team, whether it's a basketball team, football team, or a fighter team--you know, it's that question of trust. And the trust goes down to a basic instinct. Do I think this guy is someone who I want to risk my life for? Or will I risk my life for him? Do I think he will risk his life for me? Do I trust him with my life? I think it's on a basic level like that.

One officer remarked that military boot camp is specifically designed on the notion that trust between unit members is essential: "It's kind of designed to [engender trust] and you build certain trusts within the group and that trust is the basis for cohesiveness."

Many officers felt that it was difficult, at best, to build a trusting relationship with suspected or known homosexuals; but they could rarely express specific aspects of a homosexual's personality they would not trust. Their view appeared to be based on the

assumption that they would never get to know a homosexual well enough to develop any kind of trusting relationship. This common opinion implied that a homosexual could not be trusted; yet, the officers holding this view could not articulate what was untrustworthy about a homosexual.

One officer who had difficulty determining why he wouldn't trust, or feel comfortable, around a homosexual was asked to imagine a situation where he shared a friendship with an individual and then learned that his friend was homosexual. His response was that he would feel betrayed:

If I was working with someone on a day-to-day basis, and they were in my wardroom, and I became best friends with them . . . and I found out that they were gay, my first reaction would be immediately revulsion. "You lied to me. You're different. You're not who you said you were." Again, I don't know if it has anything to do with them--whether I could trust this person or whether they could do their job or not. But on a personal basis, after that, for me personally, it would be impossible to work with that person.

The same officer was asked if he thought he could trust a homosexual if he hadn't been lied to--if the question of homosexuality had never been kept a secret. His response was that he could not imagine ever having a friendship with a homosexual, so there would be no basis for trust.

Part of the trust issue identified by the focus groups is enmeshed in the feeling that the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy allows, if not encourages, deceit by military homosexuals. A common theme was that if a homosexual were willing to lie about, or hide, his sexuality, he would very likely be willing to lie about other issues. This was

clearly identified as a perceived dilemma for closeted homosexuals in the military, as well as for heterosexual service members trying to have an honest working relationship with homosexuals. The "catch-22" argument was prevalent throughout the discussion of trust: if a homosexual were honest about his or her sexual orientation, he or she was distrusted and put out of the service; if the homosexual kept his or her sexual orientation a secret, but was "found out" at some point, he or she was distrusted as a result of the secret.

Some officers were clearly able to identify the trust issue as a question of judgment: "People perceive that if you are homosexual, your vision is clouded--your judgment is distorted at some point." Another officer was able to more fully define his reason for distrusting a homosexual:

I think a homosexual has a serious lack of judgment. I mean, I think that your sexuality goes to the very base of your person, and I think if I can't trust someone to make the right decision about sex, I don't want to trust that person to make the right decision about my life. To me, that goes down to the very heart of a person, and that's one of the most debase issues I can think of, so there's a trust issue. I don't trust a homosexual to make decisions about human lives because I can't trust them to make formal decisions about everyday life.

But other officers argued that trust is built on a number of aspects, and that competence, honesty, patriotism, and so on, outweigh sexual preference. In fact, considerable discussion addressed the lack of trust as a short-coming, or "fault" of the heterosexual rather than the result of a homosexual's sexual preference. As one officer stated:

It's a natural tendency for people to kind of have a distrust--or try to distance themselves--from anything that they consider alien--or different from their own paradigm . . . I don't really think it [unit cohesion] has so much to do with the homosexual service member, as it has to do with the other people in the group. The way that they perceive the homosexual.

When pressed for specifics about the perceived lack of trust afforded to homosexuals, the officers often cited privacy as their number-one concern. Although the issue of privacy is sometimes considered as separate from unit cohesion, for the most part, the officers in these focus groups related the two issues. In general, many of the officers felt that a lack of privacy on board Naval vessels, or in any close working environment, contributed to a lack of trust and a suspicion that homosexuals would take inappropriate sexual actions with either other homosexuals or towards heterosexuals. Since privacy invaded almost every aspect of the unit cohesion discussion, it is addressed more fully below in this chapter.

### **3. Common Values**

A shared set of beliefs regarding what is right and wrong is important to unit cohesion according to the focus group officers. Yet, many of the officers felt that homosexuality was so far removed from their own "value system" as to override any other common values. These officers expressed an objection to homosexuality on religious and moral grounds, and were unable or unwilling to discuss the possibility of homosexuals sharing common values with the group. The researchers questioned the officers several times about the possibility of sharing common opinions about religion, politics, sports, and

so on, as an avenue toward unit cohesion. But, many of the officers had difficulty identifying homosexual individuals by anything other than sexual preference. Their opinion was that, if an individual “valued” a homosexual lifestyle, there was little possibility that other values could become the basis of unit cohesion between group members.

Other officers felt comfortable with the notion that they may share certain values with homosexuals, such as honesty, integrity, and a commitment to duty. They speculated that they would be able to work with, or even share a friendship with, a homosexual based on these other shared values regardless of their objection to a homosexual lifestyle.

#### **4. Shared Experiences**

Similar to trust, experiences shared by all members of the unit were seen as a major contributor to overall unit cohesion. Participation in group exercises, training evolutions, and arduous duty were noted as situations that would allow unit members to learn to depend on each other. One interview participant described the difficulty of the experience as commensurate with cohesion, implying that the more unit members are forced to rely on each other, they more cohesive they will become:

What makes a unit cohesive, I think, is basically shared experience. And that experience can be anything, but I think that typically the more cohesive units have shared experiences that are more likely to be dramatic, or harsh, or difficult experiences that engender trust among the people in that group.

Another focus group participant described essentially the same opinion:

I think unit cohesion requires a commonality of purpose. And everybody going through the same types of things together. Once they get together, keeping them together through the same training, the same education, the same ups and downs. Then they know that everybody's competent--they know everybody knows what they're doing. And they learn to depend on each other. That helps to promote unit cohesion.

As with common values, though, for many of the focus group participants, the general definition of "shared experiences" appeared to extend only to heterosexual unit members. In fact, these officers maintained that assigning homosexuals to a unit would lessen unit cohesion despite any shared experiences. This opinion was maintained regardless of the suggestion that homosexual service members share the same harsh environment or dramatic, difficult experiences. The implication was that heterosexuals do not share a "homosexual experience" with homosexual service members, so no basis for common experiences can exist.

Again, as with the common values factor, some officers defined a wide range of experiences that they had in common with homosexual military members. These officers also believed that a good foundation for unit cohesion could be built upon the shared experiences of unit members, regardless of the presence of homosexuals.

## **5. Common Goals**

Several officers described the elements important to cohesion in terms of task cohesion, but described the relationship between homosexuals and cohesion in terms of social cohesion. One officer stated:

What makes a unit cohesive is the goal. Why everybody is there together. It may be to complete a mission. It's to complete a common goal. I think that having a known homosexual in the group definitely tears away at the cohesiveness of the group.

She was unable to relate homosexuality to the group's commitment to the goal, and instead, expressed her belief that a homosexual in the group would make her uncomfortable.

Many officers echoed the opinion that a clearly defined goal and a unit awareness of that goal could strengthen cohesion in the group:

I think it's a prevalence of a team attitude in your group . . . . The group knows what the goals are. You're all on board with that and you're all acting like a team--a sports team. Everybody knows what you want to do and are all working towards that. Everybody has something to add to it, and you're working together to get there.

A homosexual's commitment was not generally questioned during the focus group interviews. But several officers claimed that the mere presence of a homosexual in the unit could detract from the "focus on the mission." None of the officers believed that their own commitment to the unit's goals would diminish if a homosexual were assigned to the unit, but many felt they would have difficulty concentrating on the mission because they would be extremely uncomfortable working and living with homosexuals.

In contrast, some of the interview participants discarded the argument that homosexuals would interfere with the group's commitment to the goal:

It seems that the more time sailors have to sit and talk, the more time they have to socialize and they're not actually working, the more this kind of thing [homosexuality] becomes an issue. As far as any unit that has real specific missions and real specific goals and is really focused on a mission, it doesn't seem to be that much of an issue.

One officer insisted that the question of commitment to the goal goes far beyond any question of sexual preference:

This may sound kind of corny, but the way I see it, swearing before your creator that you're going to support and defend the constitution is a pretty darn good equalizer--whether you're heterosexual or homosexual. I think that once you sign on to do that, everyone is equal. I don't necessarily think that only heterosexuals can fight for their country.

Another officer supported this view: "You'll have to make the analysis about whether the behavior matters to the mission at hand. I really don't see that it [homosexuality] does."

## **6. Appropriate Behavior**

Behavior consistent with regulations was considered to improve unit cohesion. In this sense, many of the officers felt that the mere presence of a homosexual detracted from unit cohesion because homosexuality is against military regulations. More often, though, actual illegal acts were specified as a detriment to the unit. Most of the officers agreed that such activities would lessen unit cohesion regardless of whether the perpetrator was homosexual or heterosexual:

I don't really think it [unit cohesion] has anything to do with a homosexual, unless that homosexual is behaving in an inappropriate way. But that could be for anyone who behaves inappropriately. It's just that when you're talking about the issue of homosexuality, I think a lot of these beliefs are magnified . . . beyond what they would be for any other behavior problem. That's certainly not saying that all homosexuals misbehave . . . But I think it becomes a stronger issue if they do.

The issue of appropriate behavior was identified as a factor important to unit cohesion, with virtually no distinction between heterosexuals and homosexuals. The focus group participants generally agreed that regulations and laws in place to punish illegal acts should be enforced regardless of sexual preference. One officer described the effect on cohesion of a homosexual who sexually assaults a shipmate:

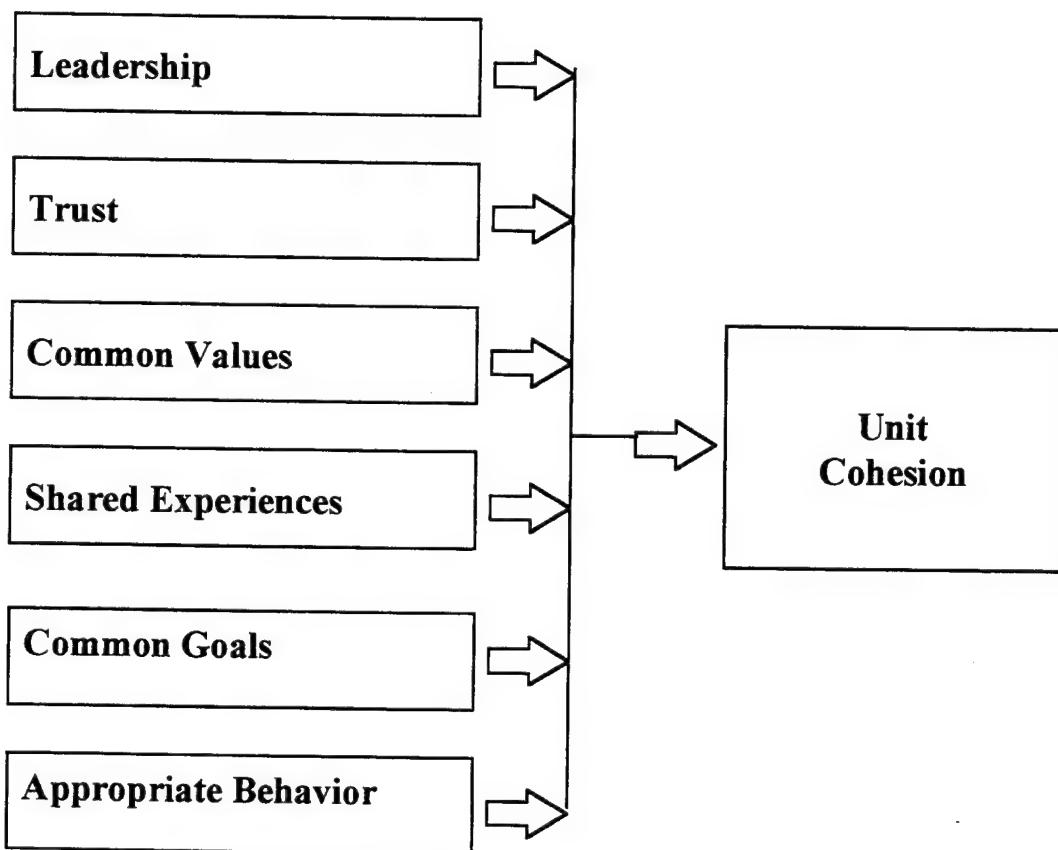
It's no different than sexual abuse of any kind. Or any type of assault. It would hurt unit cohesion . . . If the person was a thief and had been stealing out of their lockers, it's the same thing . . . It's a behavior that wasn't acceptable that would have destroyed the cohesiveness.

Fraternization, sexual harassment, and assault were often cited as inappropriate acts that may relate to sexual preference, and are discussed below in this chapter.

## **B. TWO COHESION MODELS**

As described above, the focus groups identified the following factors as the most important elements of unit cohesion: strong leadership, a sense of mutual trust between unit members, a common system of values in the unit, shared experiences, a group commitment to a common goal, and appropriate behavior as defined by military

regulations. Figure 6 depicts a rudimentary model for achieving and maintaining unit cohesion.



**Figure 6. The focus groups identified six factors as being important to achieving and maintaining unit cohesion.**

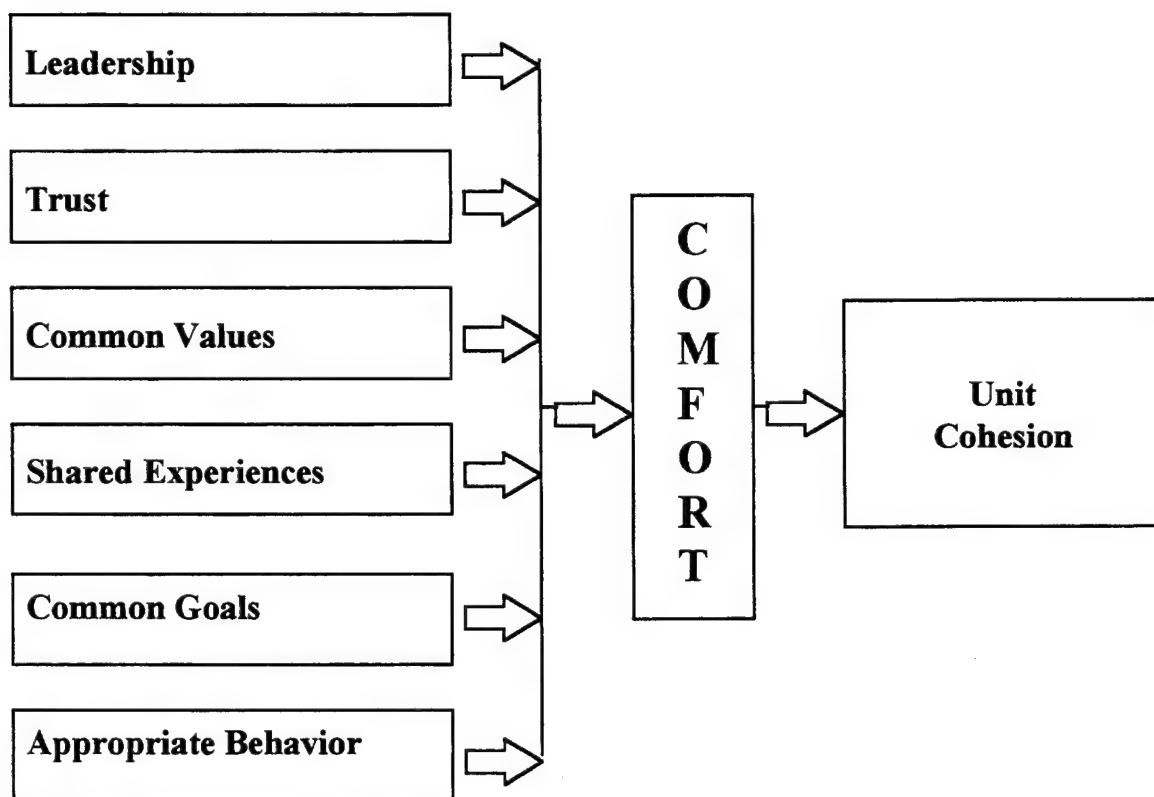
This model makes no reference to the sexual preference of unit members; it was constructed using the general comments made by focus group participants regarding what factors constitute unit cohesion. As discussed in the previous section, much of the cohesion discussion assumed that homosexuals would not be members of the group.

Follow-on discussion revealed that the model would need to be altered to include the discussion of homosexual unit members. Although no officers in the focus groups ever addressed “comfort” as a factor of unit cohesion, when asked how homosexuals would affect cohesion, the answer was invariably that homosexuals would create an atmosphere in which heterosexuals would feel uncomfortable.

In general, the officers felt that the presence of a homosexual in the unit would tend to make heterosexuals uncomfortable and would override any of the previously discussed cohesion factors. Figure 7 is a revised unit cohesion model based on the focus group comments, including the possibility of homosexuals as part of the unit. Interestingly, the comfort level of the majority of unit members did not appear to be a unit cohesion factor when discussing individuals who differed from the majority in aspects other than sexual preference. For instance, the researchers attempted to determine whether religious beliefs or political views, or even gender, could pose the same threat to a unit’s comfort level. The officers explained that the cohesion would not necessarily be based on personal friendships, and they admitted that they may not develop any personal bonding with individuals who held religious or political views at odds with their own, or with members of the opposite sex. But, they generally agreed that these differences could be “overlooked” if the other cohesion factors were in place. For the most part, the focus group participants clearly stated that unit members could create a cohesive atmosphere even when faced with varying values regarding religion and politics, but that the group could not overcome a difference in sexual orientation. In this sense, the “comfort” level of

the group acts as a gateway or barrier to unit cohesion, even if all the other unit cohesion factors have been satisfied:

As far as unit cohesion--if I'm on a ship, or a submarine, and knowing that someone else is gay--that would make me feel very, very uncomfortable. Just like I know that, working with women is the same thing--you know, feeling comfortable working next to them. I realize that being on a ship, in close quarters, I might be able to [work with women]. I can do that. I can accept that because I've seen other women and I've seen that they are just as good as, or equal to men. But, although someone is gay, and they are capable of doing the job, they're just as smart, they're just as motivated, just as educated, I would personally, inside, just not feel right working next to them. I don't know if I'm right or wrong. It's just an emotional feeling I have.



**Figure 7. An additional factor, labeled “comfort” was added to the cohesion model to indicate that a unit would not achieve or maintain cohesion unless the members were comfortable with each other.**

The issue of heterosexuals' comfort was raised over and over again during the interviews as the primary detriment to unit cohesion if a known homosexual were assigned to a unit, even though it was never identified as a unit cohesion factor. Since the comfort level did not appear to be an issue if homosexuals were not known to be in a unit, the researchers felt that the overriding link between unit cohesion and homosexuals, as discussed by the focus groups, is the level of comfort of heterosexuals.

### **C. COMFORT**

As shown in Figure 7, the comfort of the unit was described as the ultimate determinant of unit cohesion. More than any other issue, focus group participants narrowed in on comfort as the element that would dictate whether a unit succeeded or failed at achieving cohesion. However, they were never able to clearly define "comfort" as a unit cohesion factor:

I wouldn't have had a problem working with him at all, but, after it came out what his orientation was, he could still work within the unit, but there was a bit of distancing between himself and all the members of the command. I think even if we tried to put that away, and get the job done, it's still there. It's something you just couldn't overlook. You're wondering how this guy is looking at you--is he looking at you. It wasn't so bad for me, living up in a stateroom somewhere, but someone in the berthing compartment, I could imagine that would be extremely uncomfortable. If he had not come out openly, I don't believe it would have been a problem.

This expression was common throughout the interviews. And, while the officers had difficulty pinpointing exactly what caused the discomfort, their anecdotes and discussion led the researchers to identify several aspects of comfort. These aspects include sexual tension, privacy, fear of association and harassment, fraternization, and other violations of good conduct.

### **1. Sexual Tension**

Many of the officers felt that assigning homosexuals to unit would create an unnecessary level of sexual tension in the unit, and they compared this tension with perceived problems already experienced by having men and women assigned together. They felt that fraternization, sexual relationships, or even love relationships would inevitably develop between homosexuals in a unit and that these relationships could interfere with the unit's mission. One officer felt that a lone homosexual assigned to a unit could operate effectively within the framework of the cohesion model, but that "multiple homosexuals" in a unit would create an atmosphere ripe with sexual tension between the homosexuals and detract from the cohesiveness of the unit.

Many of the officers dismissed this argument as a dilemma that the military has to deal with anyway, since men and women serve together. Their opinion was that sexual tension is a problem between heterosexual men and women already. Interestingly, even though the discussion was not aimed to discuss exclusion of any group other than homosexuals, several of the male officers used the sexual tension argument to express a discomfort with serving aboard Naval vessels with women.

Aside from the sexual tension that may develop because of a relationship between homosexuals, the officers expressed deep concern about the anxiety they would feel if they suspected that a homosexual was sexually interested in them. Many of the officers were afraid that homosexuals would pursue sexual relationships with heterosexuals. Even in the absence of an actual advance, the officers felt that homosexuals would view heterosexuals as possible sexual objects. Although these concerns were closely related to the privacy issue, they were raised during discussion about situations not necessarily involving privacy. Comments were often made about the likelihood of an uneasy feeling stemming from the way a homosexual looked at a heterosexual in the workplace:

I think it's detrimental to unit cohesion because I think that's in the back of the other person's mind in a working environment. I think [heterosexuals] are a little bit uncomfortable even if they are out attempting to accomplish the mission. There's that subconscious thought: Is this person looking at me in a particular way? Is this person perceiving me in a particular way? Is this person going to take some kind of an action that makes me uncomfortable?

Only two officers in the focus groups said they had been sexually approached by homosexuals while they have been in the Navy. One of the officers explained that she reacted to the situation by "dealing with it." She said that she had been approached by someone who was already suspected of being a homosexual and simply told the person she wasn't interested in a homosexual relationship. She added, though, that she had a heterosexual friend on board the same ship who "totally freaked out" in a similar situation.

Her explanation was that different personalities are more or less likely to effectively deal with a sexual approach.

The second officer who discussed an approach by a homosexual described his reaction in similar terms. He was assigned to a ship captained by a civilian. According to the officer, on two separate occasions the captain became drunk and put his hand on the officer's leg. The officer described his reaction this way:

A lot of it has to do with how a person perceives themselves . . . How the captain was looking at me, and whether he touched me or not--I know who I am and what I'm about and what I believe in. And the fact that some other male is making a pass at me, well, it's kind of disturbing, but when you stop and assess it and you think, "well, okay, here's this guy and he's drunk, and he's a knucklehead." I'm not going to let that ruin my life. There's no point in that. But you have to be secure enough to be able to say that. And maybe not everybody is able to do that.

Several officers agreed with this sentiment, and implied that they also were "secure" enough to not become embroiled in any sexual tension that may arise between homosexuals and heterosexuals. Some of them stipulated, though, that most other Navy service members would not be able to maintain that level of personal security.

## **2. Privacy**

A concern about privacy aboard Naval vessels was paramount to the discussions regarding comfort. Even among officers who felt that sexual tensions could be avoided, privacy for heterosexuals was identified as a problem related to integrating homosexuals into the military. When the researchers tried to encourage the focus groups to identify the

relationship between privacy and unit cohesion, the discussion invariably returned to an expected feeling of discomfort by heterosexuals forced to share shower and berthing facilities with homosexuals. A considerable amount of discussion and disagreement occurred between focus group participants over a homosexual's ability to share shower and berthing facilities with heterosexuals without succumbing to sexual urges.

Many of the officers who expressed strong opposition to allowing known homosexuals into the military cited privacy on ships as their primary concern. They generally expressed two arguments for excluding homosexuals because of privacy. The first argument was that the Navy does not currently berth men and women in the same compartments or provide shared shower facilities for men and women. These officers claimed that separate facilities are required for men and women to remove any sexual feelings that may occur as a result of men and women seeing each other undressed. The second argument stemmed from their belief that homosexual men are, "by nature," promiscuous and predatory, and that a heterosexual man would never be comfortable undressing in front of a homosexual man.

Another opinion expressed in the focus groups echoed similar concerns about privacy. These officers felt that homosexuals do not necessarily create a disturbance in unit cohesion, but that the issue of privacy would be too difficult for the Navy to overcome. One officer, who was opposed to excluding homosexuals from the military on the basis of unit cohesion or moral reasons, stated that privacy posed a much more

insurmountable problem. Her view was that too many heterosexuals would be uncomfortable in shower and berthing facilities:

That's the one thing I can't get around. For everything that I think is the right thing to do, I can't figure out how to deal with privacy . . . I think there are some really sensitive issues of privacy on board ships and other places where we don't necessarily want somebody that you might be sexually attracted to or where someone might be sexually attracted to you, seeing you unclothed, or sleeping in the next rack . . . But beyond the privacy issue, I don't really see [homosexuality] as a problem.

Several other officers agreed with this opinion. They felt that shore duty provided adequate privacy to individuals because shore-based service members would normally be able to choose their own living arrangements. But, the closely confined quarters onboard ships could never afford enough privacy to relieve the discomfort experienced by heterosexuals.

A third opinion speculated that privacy should not be an issue about homosexuality unless inappropriate behavior, such as assault or sexual harassment, stems from the lack of privacy. One officer described lack of privacy as an unpleasant aspect of shipboard life, regardless of whether homosexuals are present:

You're privacy is invaded anyway. Who cares what the other person's sexual leanings are. You're working, you're sleeping, you're getting back up and you're going to stand your watch . . . What's the difference if it's a [heterosexual] or a [homosexual] in your space? You could have heterosexuals be off masturbating in their rack. That's just as bad, and that's heterosexual behavior. I don't think homosexuals are going to be walking around in berthing trying to hit on you . . . It's cramped quarters and everyone's doing the best they can not to invade each other's space.

Another officer similarly described privacy:

I've been on a ship, and I've been in a shower situation where I knew--I didn't know for sure, but the rumor was--that several of these women were lesbians . . . and you know, we were changing and dressing and doing stuff, and it didn't bother me . . . I mean, they never did anything that would bother me. They never did anything assertive or suggestive. So it never was an issue for me at all.

One officer countered the speculation that homosexuals would necessarily pursue a sexual relationship, or sexual fantasy, about a heterosexual simply because they shared shower facilities:

You redefine your sense of privacy when you go into an environment like a ship. I think you need to be careful about thinking that just because someone is a homosexual, they are automatically going to want you. [Be careful of thinking that] of all the hundreds of men . . . this homosexual wants me. It's the height of flattery, I guess. Or maybe it's a function of that individual's own insecurity. If you let it get into your head, I guess it could put you into fits. But, there are a lot of things you have to do at sea. If someone has the time to worry about things like that, I'd like to see their time schedule.

### **3. Fear of Association**

Even if heterosexuals could overcome the uncomfortable feeling of living and working with homosexuals, some of the officers felt that a close association would never develop between them. They based this assumption on the feeling that heterosexuals would be wary of being "labeled" homosexual if they developed a friendship. As one officer explained:

I would want to have nothing to do with someone who was openly homosexual simply because I would not want any inkling of the stigma attached to me. Which I think is inevitable from my superiors or my peers. I think you could work along with them but there's no way I could have the same type of socialization as with other heterosexual men, where we go out and drink beer or watch football or whatever. I just would not want to.

None of the officers related any actual personal experience concerning this type of "labeling," but many expected that they would be "razzed" as a result of either a friendship with a homosexual or by being propositioned by a homosexual.

#### **4. Harassment, Fraternization, and Other Violations**

The researchers wanted to determine whether the officers felt that inappropriate behavior by homosexuals could be effectively deterred or punished by regulations other than the homosexual exclusion policy. Opinions about the question varied widely.

Some officers were unable to answer the question because they could not imagine a Navy environment that permitted homosexual service members. They agreed that homosexuals should be prosecuted for rape, assault, sexual harassment, and so forth, but stated that the homosexual should still be discharged from the service under the homosexual policy.

One officer, though, said that regulations against harassment, assault, and other inappropriate acts would not necessarily increase the comfort of heterosexuals assigned to living and working spaces with homosexuals:

The regulations that we have now are not enough because we have to look at what we can't necessarily regulate. It's similar to the sexual harassment thing. We're trying to provide an environment that is safe and comfortable for everyone to work in . . . And I think the problem would be even greater with homosexuals. In confined living quarters, a large majority of the people are simply not going to feel comfortable living and working in that environment.

Another opinion, however, indicated that some officers felt heterosexual service members should have no reason to feel uncomfortable if regulations prohibiting assault, harassment, fraternization, and other inappropriate behavior were strictly enforced: "There are rules in place for unwanted sexual behavior." Another focus group participant explained her opinion as viewing the inappropriate behavior without labeling all homosexuals as probable criminals:

I don't see the assumption that because there have been gay rapes means that gays shouldn't be serving. Different people do different things . . . I feel that what we need to do is catch the people who are committing the criminal acts, prosecute them, lock them up for as long as necessary, and not generalize about the whole population.

#### **D. HOMOSEXUALS AS LEADERS**

Responses from interview participants were divided on the issue of homosexuals as leaders. Some officers felt that homosexuals could never be effective military leaders if their sexual orientation were known by the group. Others felt that a suspicion of homosexual orientation would be enough to discredit an individual's leadership capabilities. And, in contrast, some officers felt that an individual's leadership capabilities are unrelated to his or her sexual preferences. This last opinion rested on the assumption

that the homosexual leader focused on the unit's mission and did not attempt to fraternize or make sexual advances to group members.

Only one officer said that he had ever worked directly for a senior military officer who he strongly suspected was homosexual. This officer had been assigned as an instructor at a training command and suspected that the command director was homosexual. He described the senior leader as having "no respect" from the people who worked at the command. However, when asked to discuss the reason for the lack of respect, he relayed anecdotes related to management and leadership skills. The officer's assessment was that the leadership figure was difficult to work for because he was a "jerk," but that his poor leadership ability stemmed from the command's perception that he was a homosexual. In later discussion, this same officer described a lieutenant who had privately admitted to being a homosexual as one of the finest officers he had ever worked with. Yet, his opinion was that, had the lieutenant's division learned that he was homosexual, the lieutenant would have lost all credibility as a leader:

He was extremely well-liked by his division because he was a very positive person. He understood about taking care of his people . . . I think that whole thing would have been shattered if they knew he was gay. I don't think they would have worked for him. I don't think they would have respected him.

Several focus group participants agreed with this assessment. An officer in a different focus group described the same senior officer at the training command. While the first officer described a lack of respect from the division officers and department heads

assigned to the command, this second officer claimed that even the students had no respect for the director.

Everybody thought he was gay . . . . He had zero effective leadership skills at that school. No one had respect for him . . . . The students thought he was gay and they didn't want to have anything to do with him, didn't want to see him, they would deal with anybody else.

Their lack of respect, according to this officer, was based purely on their assumption that the director was homosexual.

One officer said he had worked directly for a civilian captain aboard a ship. His experience was in stark contrast to the training command described above:

He was a super captain. Probably the best captain I've ever worked for in any job. Just in the way he handled things. He had a very hands-off style, the department heads were left to do their own business. If they didn't do it right, he'd help them out. But they didn't want him to have to help them out. His door was always open, you could go in and talk to him. He worked with everybody. And the ship was a good ship. Things went well. We had a great reputation. As far as the ship went, we were a very tight-knit group, we had a lot of fun. And he believed in letting the crew have fun.

Not all the officers equated leadership to heterosexuality. Several officers explained that leadership qualities can be found in many closeted homosexuals, and would not be lost simply because the homosexual came out of the closet. To a large extent, these officers believed that in the absence of any grossly inappropriate behavior, a homosexual leader could be as effective as a heterosexual leader regardless of whether the officer's

homosexuality were known. One officer described a fellow Naval Academy classmate this way:

He'd been given an incredible amount of responsibility. Very well thought of . . . And it was a little bit disconcerting to myself and some friends who were associated with him . . . because we knew him on a personal level. And we wondered how everybody could change their opinion of him so fast. They thought he was such a great leader until they found out he was gay.

#### **E. HOW THE POLICY MAY AFFECT COHESION**

Notwithstanding the identified factors expected of unit cohesion, the researchers sought to discover whether the focus group participants felt that "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" can affect the unit cohesion. Although many of the officers stated that the policy could be improved, they were at a loss as to what changes should be made. At the same time, none of the officers openly advocated returning to a policy in which prospective recruits are questioned about sexual preference, or in which aggressive investigations are initiated against service members based on rumor or innuendo.

Even officers who were steadfastly opposed to homosexuals serving in the military stated that they could obey the current "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy without reservation. This opinion appeared to be based on the assumption that, if homosexuals never openly expressed their sexual preference, the unit could operate as a cohesive group in spite of the homosexual. In this sense, the officers felt that the policy was a positive influence on unit cohesion, because it strictly prohibits homosexuals from disclosing their

sexual preference and discharges homosexuals who do disclose. At the heart of this argument was the sense that allowing an individual to reveal his or her homosexuality would encourage homosexual behavior and be offensive to other members of the unit. Several officers appeared to feel that the restriction on disclosure is the only thing preventing homosexuals from openly fraternizing with each other, or harassing and assaulting heterosexuals. According to one officer:

Homosexuals that are already in [the military] don't seem to have a problem--because they know they have to conform to a certain standard and they have to keep their mouths shut about it. They don't have a choice, and they understand that. Once you give them the option to say whether they are homosexual or not, I think you'll open Pandora's box. In fact, there's no question in my mind that you'll open Pandora's box.

Another officer agreed with this statement and linked the policy to an overall disapproval of homosexuality by the military, noting, still, that homosexuals can perform military duty very well:

I'm a proponent of the policy we have now. We've got homosexuals in the military. We always have, and we always will. But I think the big difference is in whether we accept that as acceptable. It's not that homosexuality shouldn't be acceptable, it's that in doing so, you infringe on the comfort and the rights of everyone else that feels so strongly about that issue.

These officers felt that actual knowledge of a unit member's homosexuality would have a disastrous toll on cohesion. However, they were less able to explain the effect on cohesion of a "strong suspicion" about a member. Some of the officers stated that they

would be able to withhold "judgment" a person's values, trustworthiness, and so on, if they simply suspected that person of being homosexual. Even when asked if their suspicions were so strong as to virtually assure them of a person's homosexuality, these officers said that, in the absence of an observed act or verbal statement by the homosexual, they could "impose self-ignorance and avoid the issue." This support of the current policy did not necessarily correlate to the officers' comments regarding the ability of homosexuals to effectively lead military units. During those discussions, many of the officers claimed that a mere suspicion of homosexuality would render an individual incapable of leading a military unit, mainly due to the expected reaction of the heterosexual members of the unit.

In contrast to the opinions expressed above, some officers felt that the military's policies regarding homosexuals are a detriment to unit cohesion because they foster an atmosphere of deceit. According to these officers, the restrictions placed on a homosexual openly discussing many aspects of his or her private life forces the homosexual to either withdraw from social interaction with the unit or fabricate lies to hide a homosexual lifestyle. Either of these responses by the homosexual would tend to lessen his or her ability to fully integrate into the unit. Additionally, there was some discussion regarding the heterosexual's desire to remain "distant" from a suspected homosexual to avoid the possibility of actually "knowing," and incurring a military obligation to initiate an investigation.

A final opinion regarding the policy itself, and its effect on unit cohesion, indicates that some of the officers felt that "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" unnecessarily "ties the hands" of a leader in dealing with unit matters. Several of the officers felt that, as leaders, they would be capable of assessing the impact a known or suspected homosexual had on unit cohesion and could take appropriate action without necessarily initiating discharge procedures. One officer described her reaction to a report by a junior enlisted member that he had accidentally walked into a private bedroom and witnessed two Navy members performing a homosexual act:

This yeoman was someone who wasn't involved in the act himself, but had witnessed this and he was visibly shaken by it. He was young. I think he was nineteen years old. He came and reported it to me. And neither one of the two guys said anything to anyone. But there was a buzz going around the command about this party, even though a lot of people weren't going into specifics. Everyone was talking about this party. I'll be honest with you, it wasn't until the end of the day--I'm thinking this yeoman wasn't physically assaulted or anything. Basically, when he mistakenly opened up the door, he was just told to close the door. That's what he did--he closed the door and packed up his stuff and left the party. But, because of the policy, he was afraid that if someone found out that he didn't tell about it, that he'd be in trouble. And once he told me, that's exactly how I felt. I'm not going to lie to you. I thought, "who cares?" They didn't do anything to me, but I felt the same way this yeoman felt--that it might all come out and an investigator said that I knew that it had happened and didn't do anything about it. But the two individuals involved in the act--there was no problem. Two consenting adults. There was no problem, except that someone witnessed . . . . If the policy had not been there . . . I had a very good rapport with the yeoman. I felt that I could sit down with him and help him get through it. But I couldn't just do that. Once he reported it to me, I felt I was legally bound to report it to my boss.

Another officer echoed the concern that the policy unduly forces leaders into taking drastic action that may not be warranted. He viewed inappropriate behavior committed by homosexuals in the same light as inappropriate behavior committed by heterosexuals, and advocated using the same leadership tools for both situations:

Something like that would be, from a leadership perspective, a lot easier to deal with using the Navy's rules about fraternization. For shipboard environment, there are definite actions you have to take if you catch people fraternizing. But it doesn't involve ending a career by throwing them out of the Navy. To me, that allows you a lot more room to make a creative solution to the problem than does the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy. To me, that policy ties your hands right away. And you are put in the position . . . where you think that if you don't say something, but somebody else does, where does that leave you? So you have no room for any kind of opportunity for leadership at all.

This officer, and several other focus group participants, indicated that "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" may be an overly stringent regulation. Their opinion was that, unit cohesion is affected by aspects other than an individual's sexual preference and excluding homosexuals from military service was not an effective means of protecting cohesion.

## **VI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The results of the focus group interviews reveal a strong sentiment by Navy officers that homosexuals can disrupt the cohesion of military units. The officers did not agree, however, on what constitutes the root causes of the disruption. For instance, some officers felt that the mere presence of a known homosexual in a military unit would disrupt unit cohesion. Other officers said that the disruption occurs because of the military's method of dealing with homosexuals; and that "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" itself is detrimental to unit cohesion. In this regard, some of the officers remarked that the disruption to unit cohesion caused by homosexuals could be reduced by removing the exclusionary policy.

Analysis of the focus group comments leads to three general conclusions regarding homosexuals and unit cohesion: 1) the cohesion models developed from the interviews do not support the general opinion that homosexuals weaken unit cohesion; 2) many of the officers define a homosexual's identity solely by sexual preference, rather than by other personality traits used to define heterosexuals, and are thus unwilling to believe they may share the same values, goals, and experiences with homosexuals; and 3) a lack of privacy on Naval vessels leads many heterosexual service members to develop an uncomfortable feeling living and working with homosexuals, and this often outweighs concerns about unit cohesion.

### **A. FAILURE OF THE COHESION MODELS**

The author constructed two rudimentary models of unit cohesion using data gathered in the focus group interviews. The initial model reflects the expressed opinions of the focus group participants regarding what factors strengthen or weaken unit cohesion. The model is representative of definitions of unit cohesion that are described in Chapter III. This first model, however, fails to explain the focus group participants' opinions that homosexuals would weaken unit cohesion. In fact, the model suggests that homosexuals may be just as likely as any other member to strengthen unit cohesion. For instance, the model states that a unit in which members share common experiences as a group, such as boot camp, difficult assignments, arduous duty, and so on, would develop stronger cohesion than a unit in which the members shared few common experiences. Nevertheless, many of the focus group officers felt that inclusion of a homosexual in such a unit would weaken cohesion regardless of whether the homosexual shared experiences with other unit members. Likewise, the model indicates that members' commitment to a group goal is important in establishing and maintaining unit cohesion. Yet, many of the officers did not believe that a homosexual service member's commitment to the unit's goal would strengthen cohesion; indeed, they believed that inclusion of a homosexual would weaken unit cohesion regardless of the homosexual's commitment to the goal.

The author constructed a second cohesion model to accommodate disparities between the factors the focus group participants identified as being important to cohesion and their follow-on comments about whether homosexuals would affect cohesion.

Although the officers never identified comfort as a factor important to cohesion, their comments overwhelmingly suggest that homosexual service members would adversely affect unit cohesion because heterosexuals would be uncomfortable living and working with homosexuals. This second model was constructed using the same cohesion factors as in the first model, including a “comfort” factor as a gateway to unit cohesion. Within this model, even if a unit adequately reflected factors such as shared experiences and common goals, unit cohesion would not be achieved if the members did not feel comfortable with each other. Again, this model failed to support the comments of many of the focus group participants who were more apt to articulate a link between comfort and privacy, than a link between comfort and cohesion.

The cohesion models constructed from the focus group data indicate homosexuals could contribute to group cohesion if they met the requirements of the models, such as common goals, shared experiences, and so forth. The final determinant of unit cohesion, comfort, is difficult to define and assess. Even when pressed for explanations about why they would be uncomfortable working and living with homosexuals, many of the officers could not describe their feelings in the same terms they used to describe unit cohesion. Instead, they cited privacy as their number-one concern about having homosexuals in a unit.

Similarly, inappropriate acts closely related to the discussion of homosexual service members included assault, sexual harassment, and fraternization. The officers

agreed that heterosexual service members commit these same inappropriate acts and that all members, heterosexual or homosexual, should be prosecuted for doing so.

The comfort factor was more accurately described by comments linking the lack of privacy to the fear of inappropriate acts, than by comments regarding cohesion. For instance, officers felt that they would be uncomfortable living and working with homosexuals even if the homosexuals shared common values, experiences, and so on, because of a fear that homosexuals would be tempted to act inappropriately (through assault, harassment, or fraternization) due to the lack of privacy on Naval vessels.

#### **B. THE POLICY IMPEDES COHESION**

The officers who firmly believed that homosexuals adversely affect unit cohesion did not define a homosexual by anything other than sexual identity. For example, these officers were unwilling, or unable, to discuss the possibility that heterosexuals and homosexuals may share common values, experiences, leadership capabilities, and the like. This overly narrow view of homosexuals' identity may be a result of the military's policy of exclusion. Since the military is required to discharge a known homosexual, military officers do not generally work side-by-side with openly homosexual service members. As a result, many military officers are unaware that they may indeed share experiences, values, and commitment to a group goal, with closeted homosexuals already serving in their units. Their view that homosexuals impair unit cohesion because of a lack of common values, trust, shared experiences, and other factors, is limited because they are unable to define a homosexual in these terms.

The opinions of officers opposed to known homosexuals serving in the military appear to be based on two stereotypes: heterosexual service members are viewed as non-accepting and intolerant of all known homosexuals in the military; and, homosexual service members are seen as being generally detrimental to unit cohesion. The “contact theory” holds that, as more heterosexuals become personally acquainted with homosexuals, levels of tolerance among heterosexuals will increase.<sup>71</sup> Professional contact between heterosexuals and homosexuals is apt to alleviate the homosexual stereotyping that occurs in the minds of heterosexuals who fear a collapse of unit cohesion.<sup>72</sup> Breaking down the stereotypes would, thus, be a likely first step to strengthening cohesion in a unit composed of heterosexuals and homosexuals. Ironically, “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” perpetuates these very stereotypes. A “catch-22” situation is the result: the policy is intended to protect unit cohesion, but it actually supports the stereotypes that make cohesion so difficult to achieve. As author Kay Kavanagh observes, the ban on homosexuals forces “superficial social interactions and relationship with others.”<sup>73</sup> It is improbable that a cohesive unit could sustain such forced relationships.

The judgment that known homosexuals would seriously damage unit cohesion is only an assumption, at best. Author Lois Shawver discounts the presumed effect of lifting

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Kay Kavanagh, “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell: Deception Required, Disclosure Denied,” *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1995, 142-160.

<sup>73</sup> Kavanagh. 143.

the ban on the basis that the military experience completely avoids contact with homosexuals:

Our military commanders are not in a position to be knowledgeable about whether self-disclosed homosexuals could be accepted satisfactorily by military personnel. We can presume that these commanders, through their long, individual, distinguished careers, have given little thought to what it means for a person to be a homosexual, or to what kind of people homosexuals are . . . . If they thought about it in the routine of their daily experience it was, presumably, because the unpleasant reality forced itself to be dealt with. Individual servicemen and women would be suspected, investigated, identified as homosexual, and then discharged. Just like that. It was a clean process, really, not one in which commanders would have the time to study what the effects would be if these homosexuals had not been summarily removed. So, keep in mind, if the military brass declares that it would be destructive to lift the ban, theirs is not likely to be an opinion based on the experience of observing recognized homosexuals working and living with heterosexuals on military bases. The military brass is likely to be quite uninformed about homosexuality and how disclosed homosexuals would conduct themselves.<sup>74</sup>

Shawver's comments suggest that, in implementing "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," military leadership is acting under, and perpetuating, the same stereotypes that appear to hinder cohesion. Military leaders possess a great deal of intuition and insight regarding troop response to policy changes. However, they must shed their reliance on the two stereotypes--that heterosexuals will not accept homosexuals in a military unit, and that homosexuals will weaken unit cohesion--to effectively assess the impact of open acceptance of homosexuals on unit cohesion.

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<sup>74</sup> Lois Shawver, *And The Flag Was Still There: Straight People, Gay People and Sexuality in the U.S. Military* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 1995) 6.

The debate over the exclusion of homosexuals from the military will continue to evoke emotional responses from individuals and the general public. But, policy makers who are intent on making the right decision cannot afford to become embroiled in the emotional debate. Nor can they base decisions on stereotypes. “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” seeks to protect unit cohesion by excluding known homosexuals. But, if homosexuals adversely affect unit cohesion, then the effect will occur whether an individual actually states his or her homosexuality, or is strongly suspected of being a homosexual.

### **C. PRIVACY IS NUMBER-ONE CONCERN**

Even among officers who felt homosexuals do not pose a threat to unit cohesion, privacy on Naval vessels was considered a barrier to fully integrating homosexuals into military service. The link between a lack of privacy and a fear of assault, harassment, or other inappropriate behavior was common throughout the interviews.

Further research regarding privacy is warranted to discover whether inappropriate acts occur because of a lack of privacy. The officers interviewed for this thesis were, presumably, heterosexual, and could only speculate about whether homosexuals would behave inappropriately in shower and berthing facilities. However, as “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” implies, undisclosed homosexuals currently serve in the military and conduct themselves in an appropriate manner in close quarters with members of the same sex. Many of the officers in the focus groups indicated a belief that, allowing open homosexuals into the military would encourage indiscrete sexual relationships between homosexuals. In addition, they appeared to believe that accepting openly homosexual

service members would lead to homosexuals assaulting or harassing heterosexuals. Research examining the link between actual commission of inappropriate acts and heterosexual fears of such acts would be appropriate to support or negate the privacy issue.

In the end, then, “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” is only an artificial protection. Real protection of unit cohesion will be achieved if the stereotypes supporting the ban are broken. And these stereotypes will only be broken if the military allows an opportunity for the “contact theory” to work. “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” does little to strengthen cohesion; instead it is an attempt to alleviate diversity. If military leadership believes that unit cohesion is critical to military operations, an appropriate approach would be to emphasize the elements of cohesion identified by the focus groups.

## APPENDIX A

### PROTOCOL FOR FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS ON UNIT COHESION, HOMOSEXUALITY, AND THE “DON’T ASK, DON’T TELL” POLICY

#### **Interviewers:**

Terry Rea  
Maggie Friery

#### **Purpose of the Protocol:**

This protocol will be used as a guideline for conducting the focus group interviews. Use of the protocol will ensure that all appropriate information is presented to the interview groups and that each group is asked the same questions.

The protocol is divided into the following sections:

- Introduction: describes the interview and informs the participants about the general topic of research.
- Purpose: informs the participants about the purpose of the research and about how the results of the research are expected to be used.
- Guidelines: establishes rules of conduct for the interview.
- Warm-up: provides a relatively “safe” question participants can answer without controversy; intended to “break the ice”.
- Research Questions: questions relevant to the analysis; the interviewer may need to elaborate on the questions if participants are reluctant to begin discussion, but should not “dig” for information or lead the group members to a particular response.
- Wrap-up: provides an opportunity for group members to add any relevant information.
- Closing: thanks the interview participants.

## **Introduction:**

Welcome and thank you for participating in this focus group interview. Some of you responded to an e-mail request to participate in group interviews to help us define naval officers attitudes about homosexuality, military service and the current DOD policy called "Don't Ask, Don't Tell." Your names were randomly selected from a list generated by the Registrar's Office. Others indicated you were willing to participate in interviews when you filled out a survey several months ago. In either event, we are happy to have you participate in our interview today. We understand that you are busy people and we will try to be as expeditious as possible.

## **Purpose:**

The purpose of this interview is to help us explore unit cohesion in light of the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy, which excludes known homosexuals from the U.S. military. We will be conducting several interviews with other students and will be analyzing trends and perceptions of Navy officers who are students here at NPS. Additionally, we expect to interview former Navy members who have been discharged from the Navy for being homosexual.

We are conducting this analysis as a portion of research for our thesis. Terry's thesis focuses on homosexuality and unit cohesion and mine is about officer's perceptions of the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell Policy." There are several goals that we want to achieve during this time. They include:

1. We want to "sanity-check" the literature on unit cohesion and homosexuality.
2. We want to increase our own objectivity towards these issues.
3. We want to understand how the presence of a homosexual in your unit may have affected cohesion, morale and mission accomplishment.
4. We want to know if the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy has affected the way you interact with people you perceive to be homosexual.

Although we're confident that many of you have strong opinions and beliefs about homosexuality and religious views and morality, we are asking that the discussion today not focus on whether homosexuality behavior is "right" or "wrong" -- "normal" or "abnormal". While that topic is an interesting one, it is not within the scope of our research. Please, while you participate in today's discussion, try to discuss the relationship between homosexuals serving in the military and unit cohesion.

Your participation is confidential and no one will be told who participated in the interviews, and although we will be using specific comments and opinions you may express, we will not identify you by name. We hope that this promise of confidentiality will help you feel free to express your honest opinions.

We are asking you to give us some demographic data and some basic attitude data on these mini-surveys. Our intent here is to be able to document that we interviewed individuals from a wide range of the Navy Officer population, and that we interviewed individuals with a wide range of attitudes regarding the topic. Again, these surveys are confidential and you will not be identified.

### **Background:**

Before we begin with the interview, we want to review some important terms and assumptions so that we are clear in our terminology. The terms are unit cohesion, the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy, homosexual behavior and homosexual orientation.

Unit cohesion is a bonding to promote and sustain the will and commitment of group members to each other, the group itself and the mission. We assume that unit cohesion is necessary to varying degrees in military units.

The “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy is the current DOD policy that states homosexuality is not compatible with military service. Service members are never asked about their sexual orientation; however, they can be discharged if they reveal they are homosexual through behavior or statements. Under this policy, individual performance is not considered. In other words, if a person is found to be a homosexual, then he or she is discharged regardless of past accomplishments or performance.

Homosexual behavior is defined as commission or intent to commit homosexual acts. Homosexual orientation is when someone is physically and or emotionally attracted to members of the same sex. Under the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy, an individual may be discharged for stating his or her homosexual orientation, even if no homosexual acts have been committed.

### **Guidelines:**

There are a few guidelines we’d like to ask you to follow during the focus group interview.

First, you do not need to speak in any particular order. When you have something to say, please do so.

Second, please do not speak while someone else is talking. It will be difficult for us to record your opinions if more than one person is speaking at a time.

Third, please remember that there are several people in the group and that it is important that we obtain the point of view of each one of you. You do not need to agree with everyone or anyone in the group; the group is not expected to reach a consensus.

Fourth, we would like to focus on your own opinions, and would like to avoid your interpretation of how your other classmates might answer our questions.

Finally, we are not here to discuss whether homosexuality is right or wrong. We are here to learn about your attitudes towards homosexuals, unit cohesion and the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy. We are also interested in understanding how your attitudes towards homosexuals have changed due to your personal experiences.

Do you have any questions about how we will be proceeding with the interview?

Then let’s get started.

### **Warm-up:**

#### **1. What Makes a Unit Cohesive?**

What makes a unit cohesive? Is it culture, attitudes, behavior?  
Can a diverse group be cohesive?  
What factors will increase or decrease cohesion?

### **Research Questions:**

#### **2. Unit Cohesion if the Group “Doesn’t Know”**

If the group does not know a member of the unit is gay, is unit cohesion affected? Why, or why not?  
How is it different from prior to “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell?”  
How is working with a perceived homosexual different from working with an actual homosexual?

#### **3. Unit Cohesion if the Group “Finds Out”**

How is unit cohesion affected if the group “finds out?” Has anything changed? How have any of your past commands been affected by a “coming out?”  
Has your opinion changed since you knew or have worked with a homosexual? How?

#### **4. Behavior Versus Orientation**

Do homosexual behavior and homosexual orientation affect unit cohesion in the same manner? What are the similarities or differences? Why?

## 5. Policy Review

- Is homosexuality incompatible with military service?
- Do homosexuals jeopardize unit cohesion?
  - by behavior or orientation?
  - does it make a difference if the behavior is between two consenting adults?
  - does it make a difference if the behavior is private?
- Is it possible that the policy itself causes a unit cohesion problem?

6. When the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy was implemented, it was viewed as a compromise between lifting the ban, and discriminating against homosexuals. Many senior military leaders were adamantly opposed to lifting the ban. Do you think that their opposition accurately reflects the views of the military at large?

### **Wrap-up:**

I’d like to ask now, if any of you have any other opinions about the topics discussed that you think are relevant to our analysis, and that we haven’t already discussed.

If you have some comments or opinions that you weren’t comfortable addressing in a group environment, please let me know after this session, and we’ll try to arrange to meet privately.

### **Closing:**

As we come to a close, I need to remind each of you that your comments and opinions may be used in our theses. Your identities, though, will remain anonymous. We ask that you refrain from discussing the comments of group members and that you respect the right of each member to remain anonymous. Are there any questions I can answer?

Thank you for your contribution to this project. This was a very successful interview and your honest and forthright responses will be an enormous asset to our work. Again, we appreciate your involvement very much. Thank you.



## APPENDIX B

### SAMPLE FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

**7 November 1996**  
**Unit Cohesion and Homosexuality**  
**Naval Postgraduate School**

Q. What do you think makes a unit cohesive? And do you think homosexuality has an effect on unit cohesiveness?

Q. Do you think that shared culture, attitudes and behavior lead to unit cohesion?

A. How can you say that about the Navy when you end up with so many people from different backgrounds and different ethnic groups? I think it's a prevalence of a team attitude in your group--whatever size group you have. Civil behavior towards each other. The group knows what the goals are. You're all onboard with that and you're all acting like a team--like a sports team. Everybody knows what you want to do and are all working towards that. Everybody has something to add to it. And you're working together to get there.

Q. So, is your view that people with dissimilar backgrounds or races or religious beliefs could form a cohesive unit?

A. Yes. And basically, I don't have a problem with the Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy. I don't think that homosexuality gets in the way. I think that if you're a homosexual, just like if you're a heterosexual or of a different religion, you come to a professional environment, you bring professional behavior. Don't bring these other things that are going to skew people's attitudes at work. You want common ground at work. So homosexual activity, as well as heterosexual activity, is unwarranted in a professional workplace. I don't think you need to have it there. So, it doesn't matter to me if it's hetero or homo.

B. I agree. I think unit cohesion is a commonality of mission awareness, whatever the mission is, whatever the environment. If you take the lowest ranking sailor or the highest ranking sailor, they generally describe the same purpose of the organization and they'd say how they, as an individual, relate to it. Racial, sexual diversity, should be value added. But, I don't necessarily see it detracting from, or adding to, unit cohesion. If you get a blister--like really extreme heterosexuality--someone hitting on someone else all the time--or extreme homosexuality--I think it should be treated just like any other really obvious professional indiscretion.

A. It becomes a leadership challenge, I think, to try to keep an even tempo in the workplace. The leader's got to be more aware that you're trying to get unit cohesion. You've got to watch for these blisters, and get on them right away so they don't get out of control.

Q. It sounds like you're saying that heterosexual behavior that is at odds with accomplishing the mission is really the same as homosexual behavior that is at odds with the mission.

C. I agree with that. I think unit cohesion requires a commonality of purpose. And everybody going through the same types of things together. Once they get together, keeping them together through the same training, the same education, the same ups and downs. Then they know that everybody's

competent--they know everybody knows what they're doing. And they learn to depend on each other. That helps to promote unit cohesion. My opinion is the same whether it's homosexual behavior or heterosexual behavior. If one is counterproductive to the group's goal, then you have to treat that. Just the same as you have to treat someone who has a drug problem that is counterproductive to the goal of the group. It's something that's not helping everybody perform--it's breaking up or splintering the group--it needs to be treated as a problem. I don't think it should be singled out just because it's homosexual behavior.

D. One of the inherent problems in this discussion is how we define unit cohesion. There are certain levels. There's the level of camaraderie, where we're friends and we work together, as compared to actual professional relationships where you don't have diversity of personal observances or your background. If the definition is going to include the camaraderie aspect--I mean friendship--or are we going to talk specifically about the performance of completing our mission. Ideally, you could get any group with as diverse a background as possible, put them together, and if they fully understand the mission, and they are professional about it then they can carry out what they need to do and they can accomplish the mission. But in reality, as human beings, when we socially interact, that's not the way it works. You have the different backgrounds that will influence the way that you approach professional behavior. Now, as us, working together as professionals, that's one thing. But when you start putting in very junior sailors, or even civilians, or whoever else is considered part of the unit, then obviously that makes it more difficult. I personally tend to approach it on a more professional level, honestly. We should define what the mission is. Everyone should know what the mission is, and we should all act professionally, and we can carry out the mission. But realistically, I have, like I'm sure all of you have, encountered situations where somebody has been unprofessional about something--whether it be homosexuality or not--and a lot times you can't just say, "well, that's just fine and dandy, that's the way it should be because we're all human." We interact on a social level regardless of what the situation is. If you define unit cohesion at a training command, that is vastly different than what people consider unit cohesion to be on the battlefield. Because at a training command you go home, you have family interaction, you may get together with the other people in your command at a social event, whereas on the battlefield you don't have that opportunity. That must be more professional because you are doing your job 24 hours a day vice going home and getting away from the environment. So the way that we foster the unit cohesion concept is inherently different.

E. I agree that it's going to be different between different commands. When you are living on a ship you are going to have your privacy invaded. Your social situation is fixed. You can't change it. And I think you're going to have much more of a problem having perceived homosexuals in that environment. Basically, I've always been on shore duty, so I have not been on board ship. But I've talked to enough people who have been on board ship. And just trying to imagine what it would be like living with someone that I think is homosexual makes me, and I'm sure a lot of other people, uncomfortable. You get that uncomfortable feeling. That's when discipline starts breaking down, people start putting up barriers. People start reacting to the discomfort.

Q. What is it that you think people would be uncomfortable about?

E. That it's abnormal. I can equate it to being around someone who even has different moral standards than I do. Because they do this one thing that I would never do. It may be a lack of understanding. If there are things that I don't know, and I don't want to know, I'd just stay away. As far as unit cohesion, I can see it being a problem. And even though we are in the officer corps, and we're supposed to be above that, I certainly can't say that I am above that because if I've got a sailor who's working for me, whether I know they are homosexual or not, I can't say that I'm going to be able to put myself above skewing their evaluation. I can't say that it's not going to affect me.

Q. I'd like to make sure I understand what you're saying. Are you saying an officer might write a biased evaluation about a person suspected of being a homosexual?

E. Certainly. Absolutely. And that is going to affect unit cohesion. You know, you might think someone is a homosexual and the XO says, "yeah, he doesn't deserve to get ranked high." And all of a sudden you've got an angry sailor, and it's going to cause problems. Especially if it's somebody who the whole unit knows is a really good performer, and wonders what's up with that. I think it has an effect and I think if we just say it's not going to affect cohesion, I think that's a mistake. It will affect cohesion whether we agree with it or not. You can't just say it's not there.

B. I hope that's not true. If it is, I think it's unfortunate. I'd like to know, at what point, determines that someone is, or is not, homosexual. Who in the leadership thinks that because I suspect someone is homosexual, they're not quite as good a sailor as when I didn't suspect they were homosexual. That's kind of unfortunate. I hope that's not true.

A. Right, because you could do a fitrep the same way. You could jack up the marks for a good-looking sailor. It has nothing to do with work performance.

E. I'm just saying that it's there.

A. Suspicion that someone is homosexual is just as bad. That's why I think, unfortunately, that the policy has to be "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" because people have moral problems with it. Certain religions just won't allow it. Just like I have moral problems with a child abuser. There's no way that I could ever work with a child abuser. But that's illegal. Homosexuality is not illegal activity. It's morally wrong, but it's not illegal. You have to have the "no tell." But I don't like the problem of treating people differently because of suspicions. That's wrong. That's wrong. I've been on a ship. The close quarters are bad anyway. Now, is that a worry? No, your privacy is invaded anyway. Who cares what the other person's sexual leanings are. You're working, you're sleeping, you're getting back up and you're going to stand your watch. It's still a sexual problem. What's the difference whether it's a hetero or a homo in your space? You could have heterosexuals be off masturbating in their rack. That's just as bad, and that's heterosexual behavior. I don't think homosexuals are going to be walking around in berthing trying to hit on you. I think the privacy issue is a problem anyway--if you're modest. You don't want anybody around--who cares if they are hetero or homo in your berthing area. It's cramped quarters and everyone's doing the best they can not to invade each other's space.

Q. Do you guys agree with that? That the privacy issue is not a problem?

B. I don't think you have privacy on a ship. I think A's right. You redefine your sense of privacy when you go into an environment like a ship. I think you need to be careful about thinking that just because someone is a homosexual, they are automatically going to want you. Of all the hundreds of men, if you're a man, or of all the hundreds of women, if you're a woman, this homosexual wants me. It's the height of flattery, I guess. Or maybe it's a function of that individual's own insecurity. If you let it get into your head, I guess it could put you into fits. But, there are a lot of things you have to do at sea. If someone has the time to worry about things like that, I'd like to see their time schedule.

A. You see it on ships that are co-ed. Now you have the problem of getting hit on by members of the opposite sex, so who cares? You have the same problem.

Q. On the co-ed ship, are the men and women berthing and showering together?

A. No, but it's the same thing. If you're a very shy person about your body anyway--like 17 or 18-year-old people might be--it doesn't matter if it's a homosexual or a heterosexual. Now you're in this environment, and you have no privacy. You've got four showers, you've got a space this big, you've got 30 women trying to change. You don't have time to be worrying about that. You can't be worrying about that anymore.

Q. So for you, the privacy issue is not a problem involved with allowing homosexuals into the military?

A. No, it's not.

D. It seems like the policy itself is somewhat counterproductive. Because what we're doing is identifying a specific group. Whereas we don't say that Jewish people should follow "Don't Ask, Don't Tell." Admittedly, I have known a lot of Jewish people who don't outwardly display their views, but I've known homosexuals that are not outwardly homosexual. So I think that having a policy against homosexuals is, itself, counterproductive. We're saying that these people are different and we have to make special amends for them. If you're going to lump people together as a group, what's the difference between lumping women on combatants versus homosexuals in a unit?

B. I think part of it is, that up until four years ago, you could get kicked out of the Navy for declaring you were homosexual. Whereas I could have stood up in a room and said I was Jewish and it wouldn't have been an issue. So I think that may be part of the reason there was a change in the policy.

A. You still get kicked out if you stand up and say you're a homosexual.

B. Right.

A. But they don't actively seek you out. I've been at commands where NIS is going after so many sailors based on another sailor's accusations. And spending months trying to get some dirt. To me, that's just an incredible waste of resources. Forget it. Let's stop going on these witch hunts. Who cares?

Q. Has anyone here worked with people you suspected, or knew, to be homosexual?

B. I worked with a sailor for three and a half years. Everyone told me he was a homosexual. Invariably, it only became an issue at ranking time. I'm not kidding. It only percolated up to me around ranking time. But when it came time for some double det or triple det, and this guy put his hand in the air,

Q. What is triple det?

B. Like doing two deployments in a row. Or a four week deployment, and then someone's got to do eight weeks or 12 weeks. We would ask who wants to do it. This guy would invariably raise his hand. And then there wasn't a peep of dissent about the guy.

A. I had a similar experience. I had a sailor at the command center. And she was ranked as the number one sailor out of about 40 first classes. But for some reason the captain, a surface guy, just had it in his head that she was homosexual. It didn't matter to me if she was. So she got ranked 4.0, tops, every eval. Then it came time for her to transfer and the captain wouldn't give her an end of tour award. I basically got my ass reamed over that because I approached him and got into a confrontation with him about it. I thought that was wrong. He was concerned about the message it would send if he gave her an award. I asked him what message he was sending by ranking her number one and then screwing her over by not giving her an award. What did that say? Use the people while they're here? I didn't agree with that. It was just based on a notion he had that she was homosexual. She may have been, I don't know. She was a

single mom. She had the hairstyle. She was into weightlifting. I don't know. That's a stereotype thing. It didn't matter to me. She was a great worker. Really motivated, a good leader for the people in her division.

Q. But the skipper told you he suspected she was homosexual?

A. Yes, and some of the sailors did too. I know it's a social thing, but you get cliques. And it doesn't matter. The cliques can be formed over anything, and they can be disruptive to the work group. And so there was a little bit of that action going on. But I just thought it was wrong.

Q. Back to your (B) story. Did people mind working with someone they perceived to be homosexual?

B. No.

Q. And in your (A) command. Did people mind working with her?

A. The majority of the people didn't mind. There were a couple of sailors who did.

Q. Do you think that was because they thought she was homosexual, or do you think it might have been that they were jealous that she was ranked number one?

A. I think it was both of those things.

D. It's a totally different environment on the submarine. There's always the jokes about submariners, and I just let those roll off my back. But there were two guys, and it was perceived that they were homosexual and that they would go to certain areas of the sub, unattended, so to speak. And none of it was ever proven, of course. But it was just something to talk about--it was gossip. And watching these two individuals in the group, they got along fine. This is obviously inherently different, because it's all male. The situation is different from what we've been talking about. It was, to an extent, just a joke. Since nothing was ever proven, there wasn't a witch hunt. It wasn't like somebody was peeking around the corner trying to see if they could catch them. It was a subject of light conversation periodically. But no one ever accused them, or tried to throw them out or anything. On the same token, I knew an individual who worked for a good friend of mine on the boat, who claimed he was homosexual. We went through all the process--about four months of admin work--and it came out later that he was doing it just to get out of the Navy. So, there was an ugly Captain's Mast. I've never seen anything like that.

Q. Why was he at Captain's Mast?

D. He was going for the admin separation. He was actually going for making a false statement--for signing paperwork saying that he was homosexual and accepting the discharge.

Q. And then did he say he was not homosexual?

D. Someone else that he had told about it to came forward. So, when all was said and done, I remember seeing him on base two years later. He was in uniform and he was just cleaning up the grounds. Just doing some grunt work. I'm sure it was still just going through some process--a big waste of money and time. But, you can use the policy as a tool, also.

Q. About the two guys who were on the submarine with you, and you suspected they were homosexual. Did they fit in well with the group as far as accomplishing your mission?

D. That's something that's interesting. There's such a small crew, everybody has a specific job. These two individuals were part of the mess division so they actually were preparing the meals or helping clean the galley and whatever else. So they had a very set function. They didn't stand watch, but it was obvious that everybody relied on them for certain things. I don't recall anything ever becoming a problem as far as confrontations or anything else. Some people joked about it. It was even to the extent that when we were at a port somewhere they got a hotel room out in town. And when they were calling in for a muster, they called in from the same room. So, of course, even if things had settled out by then, they just exploded. You know, rumors and jokes. But it never really became a problem as far as completing what we did on our day-to-day schedule. Again, our day-to-day schedule was a very routine type thing when we were underway. It's not like we're thinking every minute of the day "this is the mission of the submarine—we're here to deter any type of aggression across the world." It just gets into a routine. We get up, we stand watch. We carry on with business and do what we need to do. And then you go to sleep, and then you get up and stand watch. And so, as far as defining what was disruptive, it's hard. But by and large, it didn't disrupt what we did on a day-to-day basis.

Q. Has anyone else worked with people you thought were homosexual?

C. Not that I suspected, or that anyone told me about. That doesn't mean that the sailors who worked for me didn't have their own rumors running around. But they never made it back to me. I can't think of any situation. The only instance I've ever had in coming in contact with a homosexual is somebody when I was in school who got caught. But they were out of there about five hours later.

Q. Was that at the Naval Academy?

C. Yes. At the Academy. Two of them got caught. The roommate told on them, and they were gone that same day. So I can't really count that, because she was just somebody in my company. I didn't suspect anything. She worked as hard as anybody else.

E. I have worked with some homosexuals, and I have, personally, had no problems working with them. But I have had limited exposure. It seems that the more time sailors have to sit and talk, the more time they have to socialize and they're not actually working, the more this kind of thing becomes an issue. As far as any unit that has real specific missions and real specific goals and is really focused on a mission, it doesn't seem to be that much of an issue.

Q. Has anybody here worked for a boss that you thought was homosexual?

A. No.

B. No.

C. No.

D. No.

E. No.

Q. Do you think that senior officers in the military are not homosexual?

A. Well, come to think of it, I worked with a senior Master Chief who was buds with the XO, and they lived together.

Q. Were they both female.

A. Yes. And probably in the back of my mind, I may have always thought that.

Q. This was a Master Chief.

A. Yes. A Master Chief and an O-5. Whatever.

B. That brings up a rank question.

Q. Yes, that brings up a question about fraternization. And you kind of mentioned it a little bit at the beginning of this session. That inappropriate heterosexual behavior could be looked at in the same was as inappropriate homosexual behavior. Why would we charge something under a homosexuality policy rather than fraternization?

A. There are rules in place for unwanted sexual behavior. Harassment. It doesn't matter if you're hetero or homo. For fraternization, the rules are already there.

E. I think they're very well defined on both sides. As far as what is fraternization and what is homosexual behavior. If we were going to discipline someone, I guess it would be up to the commander. If you have a really good sailor who makes a homosexual advance toward someone, but you think he has really good potential for the navy, he goes to mast for fraternization and he gets his hand slapped.

Q. Under today's policy, though, if you went to Captain's Mast for fraternization and it was determined that the person you were fraternizing with, or having sex with, is of the same sex . . .

E. Is it a zero tolerance policy?

A. Oh yeah. As soon as it comes up that you are, you're out.

E. Well, I guess you don't have a choice.

D. Well, that depends on who's defining it. I don't know if it's written down, but there is what is colloquially called "queen for a day." If you have one instance, then that's okay. I don't know if you've ever heard that term before.

A. No, I haven't.

B. I've never heard that before.

D. Supposedly it is a policy, and it's written down somewhere, from what I remember. That if you have one period when you have an experimentation where you're trying to find your sexual orientation, and you have one incident of it, that's fine. I think that in some ways that's hypocritical of us to say it's okay if you only do it once, but if you do it more than once--that's the definition. It just depends on how you define it. So, yes, there are very strict lines about what's considered homosexual behavior, but it depends on the captain who's holding Captain's Mast and how he or she wants to define it.

Q. In the situation that you just described, if the individual being taken to Captain's Mast for fraternization said, "this is my lover" and they are of the same sex--if the person states that he is homosexual, then most likely he would be discharged.

D. Right.

Q. You've described the "queen for a day" term in one way that we've read a lot about--a person who is trying to decide just what his sexual orientation is. He tries it once, gets caught, and says he was just trying it out, but he's not really a homosexual. And since it was just one instance, he is allowed to stay in the service. Is that how you're describing it?

D. Right.

Q. We've read a lot of literature about "queen for a day" and another situation called "it's only queer if you're tied to the pier."

A. I've never heard that.

D. I don't know that.

Q. It's similar to "queen for a day," in that when men, or women I guess, but we've read primarily about men, are deployed for long periods of time, and they're out at sea with a lot of other men, and they want to satisfy some sexual urges. That it's okay to have sexual contact with other men. The thinking appears to be that if the man's wife or girlfriend was there, he'd be having sex with her. And that the only reason the man is climbing into the rack with another man is that there aren't any females there. Once he gets back and the ship is tied to the pier, where females are available, then if he behaves in that same kind of behavior--climbing into a rack with another man--than he is homosexual. But if you're out to sea, and you're only doing it because no females are there, then you're still considered straight. That's the term "it's only queer if you're tied to the pier." That's not a regulation, it's just an argument that's used.

D. You say you've read literature that suggests that there is an attitude like that?

Q. Yes. That this behavior may exist.

D. That sounds like another argument for not going to sea.

Q. Does that kind of behavior happen at sea?

A. I don't see how that's disruptive. That's double standards.

Q. We're not asking if it should happen. Some literature written by gay authors suggests that it happens and it's allowed to go on.

B. That may be a little bit of a collective self-defense mentality on their part. I have seen the flip-flop of that. Once the crew's gone, you can go native. And I'm sure you've heard some version of this--what goes on deployment, stays on deployment. So you've got a guy walking down the street, and he's got a wife and two or three kids at home, but he's got two or three bar finds under each arm. He's one of the guys.

A. That's right.

Q. That happens when you go into a port?

B. Like Thailand or the Philippines or Malaysia. So maybe that's the same kind of mentality. That you can do anything sexually aberrant, but because you're deployed it's okay or excusable. I'm not saying it's

true, but I have seen guys leave their rings in their rooms when they deploy, or leave their rings in their seabags. Maybe it's the same kind of mentality, but I've never heard about that.

A. That's what I've heard too. But not on the ship. When in foreign port, yes, but not on the ship.

D. I don't recall even hearing rumors on the waterfront about that kind of behavior. But that philosophy depends on group dynamics. It depends on the crew of the ship itself. There are documented cases in times of war, of things like that happening, when there were very long deployments and all that stress. Where certain groups would do things like that and they would actually help each other out. I personally don't agree with it and I haven't experienced anything about it. And I haven't heard anything about it on the waterfront where I just came from, that any of the ships were having problems. But, if you look at some of the ancient wars back in ancient Greece, there were a lot of wars that were based on homosexual things. Wars that were fought just because somebody wronged their homosexual lover, so a war would be started. The group dynamics of that is a topic in itself. But, when you're under stress and separated for long periods of time, then that philosophy--I don't know how prevalent it is--but it does exist.

Q. The "queen for a day" scenario that you described, have you seen that argument used, or have you worked with someone who used that defense?

D. No. That has been brought up when we would have training on sexual harassment or homosexuals, or anything else like that. Somebody would always have an anecdote to talk about it. That's the only exposure I've ever had to it.

Q. E, you mentioned that if you were on a ship with someone and you found out that they were homosexual, that might affect the way in which you could work with that person. Do you think that you would have the same feeling if you just suspected the individual was homosexual?

E. I think it would be more of a problem if I were told. I would hope that it wouldn't affect my professional working relationship. But, actually sharing berthing and cramped quarters with someone I knew was homosexual, I would not be very happy about that at all.

Q. Is it a privacy issue for you?

E. Right. Privacy and, maybe it's just my personal belief, but I just think it's unnatural. Just to be around someone who is--and once they tell you, you know with "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," we're supposed to get rid of them. It's something that's hard for me to talk about because I have not had very direct exposure. So I could theorize until I'm blue in the face.

Q. That's why we wanted to have focus groups. Some of the literature we've read is by people who have little military experience, yet they tell us how military members will feel. Also, much of the literature is written by people who have been kicked out of the service because they are homosexual. So, we have the extremes. But you bring up an interesting point. If you have a working relationship with someone, and we'll just assume it was a decent working relationship and you were able to get your job done, and then that person tells you that they are homosexual, do you feel like you would be put in some kind of a dilemma because you have some loyalty to upholding the policy, yet you have a good working relationship, maybe even a friendship with this person?

A. Yes.

E. That's a bad spot.

Q. What would you do?

B. If they told me?

Q. Yes.

B. Well, thankfully, that never happened. But I heard so many innuendoes about this sailor, and I just didn't care. I looked at the guy, and he dominated everything that he did. And there was nothing he wouldn't do for the group. The best I could get from someone telling me was subjective . . . "I heard someone say, that they once heard someone who once knew someone who said that this guy is . . ." I told them not to come after me with that. I was always deathly afraid that the guy would come up to me and say, "Lieutenant, I am gay." I don't know what I'd do.

A. I think I'd ask what the person's intentions for telling me were. Is it because they want to pursue getting out of the Navy. Or did they just feel it would give them more relevance, or something, if they tell someone. I would want to sit down with the person and find out why they were telling me. What do they want to do? If they're telling me, then this is my obligation. But I have a problem with that. I think that they're citizens, they're taxpayers, they have a right to be in the Navy. If the sailor was a 4.0 sailor, I don't think I'd turn him in. But if the sailor was a dirtbag, I'd turn him in a heartbeat.

B. If you look hard enough, you're going to find blemishes in any sailor. I think A brings up a good point. At some point, you have to make a very realistic decision. What is the motivation of this sailor? What is this sailor? Good or bad? Are they a pain in the ass for a lot of other reasons, in addition to being a homosexual? In which case, they may have just handed you a perfect reason to get rid of the problem.

Q. Are you saying it would be a convenience? You wanted to get rid of him or her anyway, and here's a regulation that says I can?

A. Yeah, but that wouldn't be the only reason. You find out why he's telling you, and you know that well, we've also had this other problem--he's a dirtbag. Why not? I haven't had enough stuff accumulate in this other arena to get rid of him. Now I can.

B. But you'd have to weigh every case. Individual against the group. Big picture against small picture. Maybe the sailor's so tormented by the stigma. Maybe he's so tormented by the shop talk, that he's come to you for no other reason than to find out if you think he's a good person . . . does he have worth to the organization. Or do you also think he's bad, and should he leave the organization. And if the sailor's a good sailor, I would probably do what A says. I would probably say, "don't worry about it. You're doing fine. You keep contributing to the unit, and press on."

C. I think I would take into account whether it was a good sailor. And if they are comfortable enough with you to tell you, I'd take that into account. Knowing the consequences of what could happen. Having never been in that position, I think I'd have to look at each situation individually. Hopefully, it never happens.

Q. In one of the other groups we talked about the same scenario, and one of the interview group members said, "Well, I would be worried about it, because what if he told someone else and it was discovered that I'd known and had done nothing." Would that be a concern to you?

A. It's not do nothing. Explain what you did, and your reasoning behind what you did.

Q. This person was saying there was a concern about doing nothing even though they had knowledge that the policy was being broken. Afraid that they would face repercussions themselves.

A. We've all been in situations like that.

B. We've seen sailors break all sorts of rules, for all sorts of reasons. And we've all used our best judgment that it may not be that big of a deal. One good guy screws up, one good gal screws up. We give grace for other reasons. If someone came up to me and said, "hey, petty officer Smith told you he was gay, and you did nothing about it." I'd say, "I don't have anything to answer to you. If you have a problem with something you think I've done, get your paperwork together and go through the channels." Because then you're being harassed for your decision.

A. Right. But if the sailor came up and said he was using drugs. That's different. To me, that's cut and dried. Zero tolerance.

D. It comes down again to disruption of unit cohesion. If someone is having a drug problem, but you've seen no problem with his performance--he just out of the blue tells you. Would that be any different?

A. It could start impacting on their work performance and their physical well-being.

D. On the same token, if you've gone through three months of bombardment from the peers telling you that someone is homosexual, and then the guy comes up to you and admits that he is. Even if the person is a top performer, they've just substantiated all the rumors. That would be different than if a top performer just suddenly comes and tells you, and there haven't been any rumors. That to me signifies that they are not disrupting the unit. I wouldn't take any action on the person described in this second case. Just out of the clear blue, they admitted they were a homosexual--based on their performance and how well they work with the group in completing the mission. But, even if someone was a top performer, and all this has been going on in the past, I would have a hard time not taking action.

E. I find it very interesting. I asked about whether the homosexual policy was zero tolerance. Well, it is. Well, it's zero tolerance for drugs also. I am finding it hard, if we couch it in the same terms, to see any difference. The amazing thing about this whole issue is the affect that our society has on it. The societal influence. Society in general says that drugs are bad, and there's so much publicity about it. On the other hand, with homosexuality, there's so much more acceptance. All these policies that were created way back when. Now they're being changed by societal influences, whereas drugs are going the other way. When you look at the consequences of both, according to current rules, they should be the same. But they're not. I don't think the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy has accurately reflected the way societal values have changed, and have become so much more accepting of homosexuality. So they're treating it very much like it's a drug problem--even with the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell." With the drugs, you don't ask people and they don't tell you. Unless you find out, for some reason that they're using drugs. They're pretty similar. You can test people for drugs. But you can't test people for homosexuality. But it's the same treatment. Somewhere it needs to be fixed, so that it does accurately reflect societal values. There must be some way to equate it, so that it's not such a terrible thing. Even though the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy seems to be much more accepting, in reality, it's not.

A. I think it does reflect society's values. I think society's still confused about the whole issue of homosexuality. Is it okay, or not okay? To me, I think it's unnatural, but who is it hurting. Leave it to yourself, I don't want to know about it, I don't want to hear about it, I don't want anybody out there trying to pick up people at work. But I feel the same way about heterosexual behavior. Keep it out of the workplace. I think society hasn't really defined it. Republican, Democrat, Christian Coalition--what should you do with it? I think because society is confused, we don't know how to address it in the military

either. This is like a halfway thing. Don't ask, don't tell. You can be in the military, but don't let anybody know you are.

Q. Are you implying that you don't think the policy is doing what it should be doing?

A. It's not.

Q. Is that the way the rest of you feel?

E. I find it interesting listening to the discussion about the differences between drugs and homosexuality. It goes back to the way you define it. Society is changing its views because there's a part of society that believes homosexuality is something that you choose, and a part of society that believes it's biological--that it's human nature and not something that you can change. If that's the case, how can you deal with that? If you believe it's biological, you can't treat it the same way as drugs. If someone takes drugs, it's something they choose to do. They can choose to start it, they can choose to stop it. In that case, I see a difference in the way it should be handled. I think we have a textbook definition, but it will depend on your opinion of the definition.

A. Right. Whether it's biological or choice.

Q. Some people in our interview groups have said that you can't trust a person who is homosexual. Do you agree with that?

E. You can't trust anybody.

A. Oh, come on.

B. That's a pretty extreme prejudice, and I'm sure that person, whoever he or she is probably allowed their perceptions of people that are different from themselves--you know, I don't trust women because they're bad, I don't trust homosexuals because they want me, I don't trust Democrats because they want to tax me. I'm sure the litany could go on and on for that individual. That sounds like kind of an extreme thing to say.

Q. Could you tie it back to the drug analogy? If you found out that someone was using drugs, are you sure that you could trust their judgment in a mission situation?

A. Well, it's a case-by-case thing. How did they get involved? Is it something you can fix with medical treatment? How did they end up in this situation?

B. And don't forget that alcohol is a drug. And if you open up that Pandora's box . . . there are times when we would get on the plane and the pilots, on their way up the ladder, would be shaking. We just shook our heads at some of these guys that climbed into the flight station.

A. Yeah, I remember.

B. So, I think you have to be careful when you talk about drugs. You have to include alcohol and that's a tough one to get a handle on.

A. You get concerned about their performance, and that makes an impact.

D. Any way you look at it though, once they admit to having a drug or alcohol problem, you have to take some kind of action. You can't just sort of take it as, good performer, one bad thing--sort of gloss over it. It has to be dealt with.

Q. But you don't think homosexuality is the same? If someone told you that they were homosexual, would you necessarily question their judgment?

B. No, not at all.

D. No.

A. It doesn't have anything to do with it.

E. I think it's very silly to do that. You can have a sailor who you just don't trust period, because they're a bad performer. I find it very difficult when people say that because someone is one thing or another--or even because of one incident--that they suddenly can't be trusted. Everybody's got their failings.

Q. You've all said that you haven't worked for a boss you thought was homosexual. But, do you think you could?

B. Do you mean, "Welcome to the unit, I'm your boss, I'm gay?" I think I'd be a little bit stunned. I think I would use this attitude: Your views are your own. Please respect me in not catering to that lifestyle. I expect you to treat me as a professional. I will certainly treat you as a professional. I want nothing but a professional relationship. If you feel that your attraction to me precludes you from being professional, I suggest that one of us somehow leave this organization. That's how I would handle it.

Q. If you suspected a Navy captain of being homosexual, and there was not overt action towards you . . .

A. No. That's just your perception. Whether he's a lousy boss or not.

B. I've got to tell you. I don't go around suspecting people about being homosexuals. If a guy comes up to me and tells me he thinks I'm a good looking guy and he wants to kiss me, I would suspect. But failing that, I don't think about it. I don't mean to trivialize it, because I know people get into a mind set. But I think you've got to be careful about doing that. I certainly try not to do that.

C. It's passing judgment on someone before you get to know them. My personal philosophy is to try to get to know someone before passing judgment on them. I think that shows an ignorance and shortsightedness on anybody's part--if they try to judge someone before they know them. If I get to know a person, and observe some things about the person, then I might be able to develop an opinion.

Q. Two of you described junior people who you suspected were homosexual, and were good performers. And you said you would keep them in the Navy. What if it was someone you worked for? A skipper. And he didn't break the policy, he didn't state that he was homosexual, but you found out accidentally that he was. Could you still work for him?

B. Sure. All other things being equal. Sure.

A. Yeah.

D. It depends on how it manifests itself. If you report in somewhere and you immediately discover that he's homosexual--or if you've been working for someone for six months, and working with them, and

then you discover it. Then it's just an experience as far as your relationship with the person goes. If they're a good performer . . . it goes either way--someone that works for you, you'd make amends for. Someone that you work for, same thing. I personally wouldn't feel pressured if I worked for somebody and they were homosexual. This goes into the sexual harassment issue. If they started making overt advances I would risk my neck in reporting them. I wouldn't sit by because they write my fitrep, and play the game, and go along with it. But if the person I work for is a good performer and is working towards the goal, the mission that we have, then I wouldn't have a problem working for him.

Q. So are you saying that if you suspected a leader was homosexual, you would have no problem working for that individual, as long as no inappropriate behavior was displayed towards you?

A. Right.

D. Yes.

Q. How do you think junior troops would react?

A. Well, I think you are setting the example. If you are respectful of your boss, you are setting the tone for the workplace, and the junior troops will follow your lead. But if you rant and rave and get on your high horse about morals and stuff, then they are going to follow that lead.

Q. Are you saying that leadership plays a big part of how the rest of the unit reacts?

B. It sets the whole part.

A. You're setting the example.

Q. Do you have any examples? Some other people have told us that junior enlisted members don't really care what their officers think. The junior guys form their own opinions.

B. They have had some trivial officers then. Why take a commission then? That's what we're about. We're about leadership. That means we set the example. If you're grousing about your suspicions about the boss being a homosexual--that's horrible. That's a cancer. If the sailors see you treating that CO with nothing but deference and respect, they're going to follow the lead. It's natural. I think something in us always wants to follow a good example. I think it's incumbent on us to set that good example.

A. Or you make it an issue or not. If you make it a non-issue, they don't pick it up.

E. I don't know if I agree with that because you may set an example, and you may say you don't want to hear gossip. But they can still go off and find some reason to make life difficult for whoever it is. So, in some respects, you can set an example, but you cannot determine what your people are going to do and how they are going to act.

Q. Some people have told us that they would not want to develop a friendship with someone they thought might be homosexual because of what other people might think. That other people would think they were homosexual simply because of the friendship. Do you feel that way? Is that kind of thinking prevalent?

A. That is something that depends on how confident that person is in themselves. I think sometimes homosexuality becomes a big issue because you have young sailors. They're so impressionable--17 or 18 years old. They're not confident in themselves and they're very threatened by this kind of behavior.

Q. Do you think that's what goes through their minds?

A. I think some people probably think that way. That they don't want to work with homosexuals because it's going to rub off on them, or that they'll be hit on, or that other people will think they're gay too. That's probably the same as it was back in the 50s or 60s or whenever. When they integrated blacks and whites in the military. The feeling that, "Oh, I can't talk to this African-American or people will think . . ." They had the same kind of integration problems back then--trying to get people to work together. Right? Aren't they kind of parallel?

Q. Some people say that the situations are parallel. Do you think so?

B. Not really. I doubt that it's immoral, but I certainly think it's abnormal to have a sexual encounter that doesn't produce offspring. To me that's fundamentally abnormal, and unless I'm missing something, I don't think any other species on this earth has a tendency toward homosexual activity unless they're genetically or experimentally altered.

D. That's not true.

A. It's an abnormal behavior or there would be more of it. Maybe there is more of it, and we just don't know about it.

B. I only set that up as a model to support that I don't necessarily think it's a good parallel with minorities integrating into the service, or females integrating into the service. It's certainly far more normal, if not desired, to have as much diversity ethnically, sexually, racially, in an organization. I would not necessarily say that integrating blacks and women is the same as trying to integrate homosexuals. I certainly review the same result as desirable. That is, there's no problem, it should be encouraged. But, I don't necessarily know that the two should be parallel to each other.

A. Well we saw the same issue about women on combatant ships--that it would affect unit cohesion. There would be different loyalties when the stuff hits the fan--you're in a battlefield situation and they can't carry their weight. People probably used the same mindset--the guy's homo, they're going to detract from the group when we're under stress because of that. I think there are some similarities.

B. I don't necessarily feel that way, but I think you are right--that some people do feel that way. There was a guy a couple of weeks ago when we had the SGL on stress, who asked if there had been any studies on stress in an organization when women and homosexuals are introduced. I thought it was kind of weird to link women and homosexuals as stress contributors. So, I guess people do view them as parallel. I don't.

Q. That is an issue that has been brought up with other Navy officers--that bringing homosexuals into the service creates a tremendous amount of stress. Your comment is almost opposite from what some other people have told us--that they want to limit diversity because it's too hard to manage.

B. How easy is it for me to be in charge of twenty guys from a poor to middle-class white neighborhood from the suburbs of Chicago. Right off the bat we've got a lot in common. That's not what being an officer is about. Being an officer is about taking many different elements and drawing them toward some common goal. That's leadership. It really wouldn't be hard for me to go back to my home town and get 10 guys to do something with me. But it's a lot more fun, a lot more challenging, to get people from Florida, Maine, California, Alaska, men, women, Republicans, Democrats--that's what's challenging--that's what is rewarding about being a leader. I don't want to lead 10 white guys just from Chicago. That's no fun.

Q. But is the objective of the military to allow you to have fun?

B. No. It's certainly mission accomplishment. And I don't think that lack of diversity is a guarantee of better unit cohesion. I don't necessarily think that 10 white guys are going to perform a lot better than a more diverse group. I don't believe that.

Q. What do you think is the key?

B. Leadership.

Q. Leadership is the crux, in your mind, of unit cohesion?

B. Absolutely.

A. But it's also what we discussed earlier. When you work together and go through experiences together, you've endured tough situations together, then you have the respect and the trust of the shipmates that you went through it with. Because leadership is at all levels. It's not just the guy in charge of the ten people. Everybody has some leadership qualities they bring to a situation. So when you get these guys in a group, it comes together--you don't just get it right off the bat.

Q. The current policy discharges people whether they perform homosexual acts or whether they just state their homosexual orientation. Do you see a difference between homosexual acts or orientation on unit cohesion?

B. I guess it depends on the degree to which they do either. My [understanding of the defense used for Petty Officer Meinholt] was that there is a fundamental difference between stating homosexual orientation and committing homosexual acts. Maybe you have to be a lawyer to understand the difference. I guess I can kind of see it, but in my mind, I don't see how one or the other would have a different effect on the unit. Whether one guy say's he has engaged in homosexual activity, or another guy says he thinks he is a homosexual--I don't know if there is going to be a different reaction. I guess Meinholt did okay--he came back in. I was fascinated by the reasoning and I'm still not sure what the exact differences are substantively, nor how I would handle the difference as an officer.

Q. Under today's policy a person would be discharged if they said they had committed homosexual acts. And a person would be discharged if they said they were homosexual--sexually attracted to members of the same sex--but had not committed any homosexual acts. So, do you see a big difference?

C. I think that most people think that one follows the other.

A. That it's all the same.

Q. Is there a difference on unit cohesion between a homosexual committing homosexual acts at home, in his own bedroom, no fraternization, no sexual harassment--is there a difference between that scenario on unit cohesion, and a homosexual committing homosexual acts onboard ship?

A. Yes. And that's true of heterosexual behavior too. Same thing.

B. Consenting adults in the privacy of their own homes--leave it there, don't bring it to work.

A. Right. Do whatever.

Q. What if the consenting adults were two Navy guys? Same paygrade, different ships?

B. Well, we know it's happened. I would say that if it's consensual, and it's private--they're not advertising it, so they're not trying to make it a problem. They're not bringing it into work. You've just got to hope that whatever they do, they leave it at home and once they get to work, they're professionals.

Q. Do you think it would make a difference if you were at a shore command and there was a homosexual in your work unit and he kept a picture of his gay lover on his desk.

A. And he doesn't explain the relationship?

Q. Well, even if you asked who the picture was, and he told you it was his boyfriend. But he didn't talk about any sexual activity, he didn't make a grab for you. Would that affect unit cohesion? He's openly gay, but he's not doing any inappropriate behavior at work?

D. That would depend on the dynamics of the group.

Q. How about with you?

D. A whole bunch of me in one work place? I wouldn't have a problem with it. But I don't consider myself the average as far as tolerance.

Q. Do you consider yourself more tolerant than other Navy personnel?

D. Yes. Especially when you talk about junior enlisted. They're right out of high school, they've been under their parents' wings for quite a while--under their moral influence. As compared to the situation, like here, we have older officers who have been through--you know--education before they got here. That's inherently different, because we've had time to form our own opinions and experience life and come up with our own perspective on things. You're still influenced by your parents, but it sort of gets seasoned along the way as you grow.

E. I think it gets hardened. As you get older, you get people with much more unmoldable perspectives--in a rut--of exactly what they think, and their opinions. You get "well, I've seen the world, and I know how things work." As opposed to somebody who's young, just coming into the service--who's been out there in what we haven't experienced--a much more accepting environment.

Q. It sounds like you're saying, D, that some level of maturity and experience might temper someone's views. Allow them to be more tolerant?

D. Yes.

E. I don't agree. Not from what I've experienced. No. I don't think that people get more open-minded as they get older. Most people get more close-minded because you view the world in a certain frame, and the more you view it in your own frame, you'll bring in things to justify the way you think, and the way you feel.

Q. How do you view that scenario then? You're shore-based and a petty officer has a picture of his boyfriend on his desk? Will that affect unit cohesion?

E. I think in some way, shape, or form, it absolutely will. Because it's built in with the policy--it's going to cause some problem. You're going to have it just because of the way the policy is written. You'll have somebody else mentioning it, asking questions, whatever. It's not a privacy thing. It's not something that you absolutely don't know about. So somebody's going to ask questions at some point and it's a gray area. You're not asking, but he's telling--here's my picture.

Q. Are you saying that the policy is going to create the problem because everyone will know he's breaking the policy? And he shouldn't be breaking policy?

E. Yeah.

Q. Well, say that policy wasn't there? Would it affect unit cohesion? If the policy was "Don't Ask, Don't Care"?

E. I don't think it would be as much of an issue at all.

A. It would make me feel uncomfortable. I don't want to know about the relationship. It's aberrant behavior, but it doesn't hurt people. I don't want to have it in my face like that. It would make conversation awkward. I don't want to discuss what they did over the weekend--I don't want to get into that. But I have the same problem with heterosexuals, too. People normally have pictures of their girlfriends, or families, or whatever. I don't get into a lot of big personal discussions about their lives, or what they did over the weekend. You do enough so you feel good about who this person is, but I don't want to talk about it. I don't want to know about it.

Q. Do you feel that you would be more reluctant to find out anything about a person's private life because you would be afraid that they would actually tell you that they were homosexual? Would you try to keep your distance from somebody you suspected just to protect yourself from finding out?

A. No. I keep a little bit of distance from people who work for me anyway. Just to maintain a professional relationship. But I know enough about their interests, or what they like to do, or what they do outside of work, so that I can make small talk or have a conversation.

E. But since we do have the policy, I would have to kind of question why the person put the picture up in the first place, knowing full well that that would be letting everyone know that he's homosexual. I would have to question the person's judgment in that respect.

Q. Do you mean because they are breaking the policy?

E. Yes. Because if someone asks "who's this person?" and they say it's their brother--that's one thing. But if they say it's their lover . . . I think that's pretty obvious. In the situation we were talking about earlier was that they came to you in private, but this is much more open. I think that's a different situation. That person is either trying to prove something, or has some sort of problem, or just doesn't know what to do . . .

Q. Are you saying, then, that it's a problem because they are breaking policy? If the policy weren't there, then you wouldn't be questioning their judgment about having a picture on the desk?

E. I would say that if the policy weren't there, then I couldn't care less. If you want to put a picture of your loved one--whoever that is--if that helps you get through the day--then so be it. If the policy isn't there, I don't think it should make a difference whether the person puts a picture of their pet dog, or their boyfriend, or their girlfriend.

A. Yes, but I still think you're going to have problems with the other folks that you work with. Because I don't think it's resolved in general society. So it's not resolved in the Navy, because society is where our people come from. So, with such a blatant thing, I think you would have to do some work--look at unit cohesion. Some things might start slipping. But why is that different than if everyone suspects that this person is homosexual? I don't know. It's hard evidence or something. I don't know.

E. In the real world, you know, there are some people who are going to be bothered by it.

Q. You were saying, D, that if the division were full of people just like you, there might not be a problem. But you didn't think it was likely that there would be such a division? So there could be a cohesion problem?

E. Everybody has their own attitudes, and the way they look at things. There are going to be people on one end of the spectrum, and on the other end. Odds are, just on average, you're going to have someone in your group that will have a problem with it.

Q. Could leadership deal with that?

E. It depends on how extreme it is.

B. I think C really hit the crux of the issue. Why is that gal or guy putting the picture on the desk. It's one thing to look at a picture of someone who helps you get through the day--a happy, smiling, caring face that you really care about. But if the individual is savvy, or if the individual really respects unit cohesion, I've got to also believe that they're going to know that this may not be the thing to do. That maybe they could keep that picture in their wallet, or in their locker, where it's a little more private. So, I think I'd wonder why the person has it out there. If the guy had a swimsuit calendar picture of his girlfriend, other women might be just as offended as a guy who sees a guy in a thong on someone's desk. So, in that respect I think we should keep the pictures responsible. If everyone was like me, I don't think there'd be a problem. But like C said, society still has hang-ups with this, so there's bound to be people in the office with those types of hang-ups. Hopefully, the person who posted the picture would be respectful of those hang-ups and try to minimize any trauma to the organization.

A. Yes, but it goes the other way too, though. They have their rights too. This is their loved one, just like your wife or your child is significant to you. They say, "you're denying a part of me." I just don't have any personal artifacts on my desk at all. You don't want to have to do that either--ban all personal items. For me, the harder thing is that I have had three sailors who have been diagnosed with AIDS. I don't necessarily know how they got it--homosexual activity or drugs--and it was a very small group--maybe 20 sailors. A couple of them fit the stereotype of what a homosexual guy might be like. So, the other sailors would joke around and tease. Two of them were joked and teased a lot. But the other one wasn't. They got along better with this third guy, and I have always tried to figure out why that was. Maybe the other two were more effeminate. But that's hard for me to deal with--now I have somebody with AIDS, with a disease.

Q. Did the other people in the division know that they were HIV positive?

A. No, they didn't know they had AIDS. But I could see that they thought these guys were homosexual and they teased and joked. The team that I had was pretty good, we worked in a command center--you don't get dirtbags there. They all did well. But the joking and the teasing goes on, and it's up to this guy's fortitude--hang in and joke back or come back with something else.

Q. When they joked and teased, were the jokes about being homosexual?

A. Well, they might tease about fashion sense, or who does the cooking. But not like "don't come to the gym with me." Not that kind of teasing. Just joking like "nice outfit"--that kind of stuff.

Q. What do you think about the theory that homosexuals would affect unit cohesion--particularly male groups--because the rest of the unit wouldn't be comfortable joking with homosexuals? You wouldn't be comfortable making the same kind of jokes?

A. That's just like you don't tell the African-American jokes, the religious jokes, or whatever.

Q. So is your viewpoint that it would not be an issue?

E. It's the same issue with women. Your behavior around women, as far as I'm concerned, would be not only group dependent, but should be based on professionalism. I've heard a lot of belly-aching from guys that they can't tell the same jokes. Well, good. Because the speech and the language is just so foul when men get together. It's a socially accepted norm for them to talk like that. But, personally, I don't think you should talk like that, and tell jokes like that. You shouldn't be perpetuating it. If you have to change your behavior so that it is professional . . .

B. Well, I've met some women who can swear . . .

E. Oh, I'm sure of that.

A. But if you look at 24 and 7, though, you've got to have a time to let down. You've got to let them get into that mode.

E. Yeah, but I've heard a lot of guys who've said the same thing--we can't act the same because we've got women here now.

Q. On the issue of homosexuality, though. What would preclude a heterosexual guy from using foul language in front of a homosexual?

A. Nothing. They wouldn't know. They'd tell the gay joke.

Q. Even if they did know? Your comment earlier about ethnic jokes . . . would you stop sitting around telling those kinds of jokes if a black person joined the squadron? If the norm was to sit around telling gay-bashing jokes, would the group stop that if a perceived homosexual joined the squadron?

B. I don't know if ten guys collectively think, and act, that way. That they think that they can scratch, burp, fart, swear, say all the dirty things. And then think, "oops, here comes somebody who's not one of us, now we have to consciously stop--and now I really resent that." I don't know if that really happens.

E. Oh, it does.

B. I've been with some air crews, and they say some pretty nasty things. I come from a big family, and it takes a lot to shock me, but I would say "hey, that's enough--you're getting pretty gross, it's time to stop." And invariably they do. And if there was a group of guys carrying on in that kind of fashion, and the homosexual came in and said it was bothering him. I would think that the ten guys, out of respect, would stop. I hope they wouldn't resent the person for that.

Q. But why would people think that a homosexual would not want to talk about those kinds of things--scratching themselves, farting, burping--whatever the rest of the group wants to talk about?

B. I don't know that they wouldn't.

Q. Is there a kind of banter that goes on in groups that would have to significantly change if a homosexual joined the group?

B. I don't necessarily see that it would happen that way.

A. No, I think you just continue the behavior until something happens and you have to change it based on someone's ethnic group, sexual behavior, gender, whatever. And then you go on.

E. You are defining it as waiting until someone says they are offended. No. Even in the Navy, it's mandated. Even now, we are not supposed to have any kind of prejudice. You're not supposed to have ethnic jokes. So, there will be changes. And I have experienced walking up to a group of guys, and they feel like they have to apologize for their language.

Q. Do you feel that changes the cohesiveness of the group, then? If you see a cohesive group, and you walk up to it, and the conversation changes--has the cohesiveness changed?

E. Yes. It has. I would not be a part of the group. When the behavior changes as a result of the group dynamic change, it takes a while before they find another way to interact--to include me. It does change--I'm separate until they can find something. There's going to be a really big adjustment period.

Q. How much time?

E. It depends on the group. No matter what, there is an adjustment period. When you get people who are different than you, you definitely change behavior and cohesion is going to be affected. Whether it's for a short period of time or a long period of time.

B. That's part of group dynamics. If you're the new guy, and you're naturally going to try to fall in. If you don't fall in, hopefully, everybody else respects that. I might propose to you, that when they saw you come in and they stopped chatting, was it because they thought, "here comes a woman, or here comes an officer, or we're talking about ditching work early--she's the last person we want to hear that."

E. Of course, it could be different. But my opinion is that your cohesion is going to be effected.

C. They would have to adjust a little bit, to include you, so that there is unit cohesion again. But that's the good part of group dynamics.

B. That's bonding.

A. Why should they change for one person?

B. Well, if that one person happened to be the boss, they would change.

A. Well, yes.

B. So, I would think, that out of respect, they would do it for the seaman recruit or the O-4 that's sitting as department head.

A. Yeah, but you can imagine a bunch of guys in a particular division, and a new guy comes in. It depends on pecking order. Are we going to attribute it to rank? If the new guy comes in as an E-3, will the group say, "we're the majority, we've been here the longest, get on board with it or go somewhere else?" But if the new guy comes in as LCPO or LPO, it just changes? I don't get it.

Q. Does it matter if the new person arriving in the group tries to get along? Is the group ostracizing a new person just based on that you're a women and they're guys? Or because the new guy is homosexual and the group considers themselves to be heterosexual? Or are they going to allow a homosexual in because they think he's an okay guy?

E. There's always some kind of initiation in a group. When they get to know you, and totally depending on the person, whether you earn their respect, whether you find things in common with people. If you don't find any commonalities, or make it a point yourself to be social--get to know them--yeah, you're going to be ostracized. You're going to remain very separate. But there's always some sort of phase you're going to have to go through.

Q. But you can get over that?

E. Oh, absolutely.

A. We all have that experience because of the nature of our jobs. We move around a lot, and we have to go through this all the time. We have that in common. We all go through that, whether you're a homosexual or a heterosexual.

B. I think you go to a new command minding your Ps and Qs, and I don't necessarily think that's dependent on whether you are a homosexual or not. Or assuming that everyone in the office is homosexual, or assuming everyone in the office is heterosexual.

Q. Do you see a situation where a homosexual would be allowed into the group as long as they shared some common interests or goals with the rest of the group.

A. Sure.

B. Yeah. I hope that possibility exists. Sure.

Q. The "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy states that homosexuality is incompatible with military service. Do you agree, or disagree, with that statement?

B. I disagree.

C. What about it, does the policy say is incompatible?

B. With all due respect to our senior leadership, I think there's some significant generational mindsets. There's a difference between the senior guys--like Kelso, Boorda, Johnson--and us. I'm not saying that's good or bad, I'm just saying there are definitely some differences. This may sound kind of corny, but the way I see it, swearing before your creator that you're going to support and defend the constitution is a pretty darn good equalizer--whether you're heterosexual or homosexual. I think that once you sign on to do that, everyone is equal. I don't necessarily think that only heterosexuals can fight for their country.

C. I don't think that they are incompatible. What comes to my mind is that adultery, by UCMJ, is punishable. And it happens all the time. What distinguishes improper heterosexual behavior from improper homosexual behavior. Both of them are societal norms, for the most part. Where is the difference? We don't say that heterosexual activity outside of marriage is incompatible with military service. That, to me, would equate. So, I don't think that homosexuality is incompatible. I'm very much in agreement that once you sign up and have made a commitment, you're not going to be less committed, or less capable because you're a homosexual. I think a lot of the senior leadership's view is based on fears. Their fears that they haven't dealt with. They might be thinking like me, "I think that if I were in that situation, I'd hate it." They don't know. I don't know any background on studies that they've done.

Q. Do you think it's incompatible with military service, D?

D. No, I don't. The way that we define it in the policy itself--we're comparing two things that are on two different planes. They shouldn't have anything to do with each other. And so, for us to make a policy for one based on the other, doesn't make any sense to me. What we're defining as a problematic situation depends on which rule we're going to decide to break. And then we're going to define that situation as incompatible regardless of other rules that we break. I think the policy itself is hypocritical.

E. I don't think it's incompatible. I believe it's biological, it's human nature, so I don't think it makes any difference on a person's capability to serve in the military. What makes a difference is your intelligence and your willingness to go into battle. I personally don't believe that sexual orientation should be a judgment.

A. I don't think it's incompatible. But I think if you took away the rule right now, there would be a lot of problems because there are a lot of people who are morally opposed to homosexuality. The policy is trying to deal with that. There are rules that you could apply--inappropriate behavior on a ship--there is inappropriate heterosexual behavior also. I think there are enough rules already that can handle any situation. But this is a very divisive issue. But if we were out there today, and this rule was reversed, stand-by.

Q. Are you saying that homosexuality is not necessarily incompatible with military service, but the way in which the rest of the Navy might react may cause a problem?

A. It's a moral issue for many people in the Navy. It's against their religion. They don't see how they can work with homosexuals. You can't just take the rule away and think everything is going to be fine. I think there are going to be adjustment problems.

Q. So are you saying that homosexuality itself is not what's incompatible, but there's a problem with the way other people feel about homosexuality? The comfort level of other individuals is what would cause the problem?

A. Right.

Q. Back to a statement you made earlier about senior leadership. When the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy was implemented, it was seen as a compromise between lifting the ban, and discriminating against homosexuals. Many senior military leaders were adamantly opposed to lifting the ban. Do you think their opposition accurately reflects the views of the military at large?

B. I suspect it doesn't. I think there are few decisions of theirs that does reflect consensus.

A. I think it's the older generation. The older mind-set.

B. I think they had a big unknown, and it was a big fear for senior leadership. These are people who are pretty far removed from leadership as we are involved in it--liberty chits, rope yarns, someone's wife is having a baby--that's the kind of leadership that we're used to dealing with--very close-knit, very small. The senior leadership is dealing with a lot of macro issues, so I think they view leadership far differently from the way we do. And I think that they have a little bit different baggage than we do. Now that I think of it, I think they may have erred in handling the situation. I wish it had been handled more methodically, not necessarily as a catalyst to a political election. I think it happened when Clinton came in in 93--it was almost like a shotgun. It probably could have been brokered in a little bit more deliberative fashion.

Q. Is it your view, then, that senior leadership based their opposition on their own personal views and fears? And they thought that all their soldiers and sailors must have the same feelings?

B. I doubt that when they made the decision they thought about what would the JO feel. What would the E-5 feel. When you're a four-star, you're pretty far removed from that. I doubt that they have the mental discipline to really go back to what it was like as a JO. If you're a JO, working your butt off to get the mission accomplished, so long as the homosexual is a contributor, you have unit cohesion, fine. Keep sailing, keep the mission going. I think that if they'd thought about it long enough, that would have been their ultimate conclusion. I think they'd like to believe they had our best interests in mind, but I think they actually had their own interests based on protecting their fears--not to protect us.

Q. Do you think it's possible that they were trying to protect unit cohesion? And to protect homosexuals themselves, from violence?

B. I'm sure that those are things they convinced themselves of. I don't know if it's necessarily true.

A. But you could see it happening.

D. You've got to think that they've made Admiral based on their experiences and what they've seen. And they understand group dynamics, even though it may have been defined a little bit differently as they were coming up the ranks. And they understand that if they were to take a policy and completely reverse it for the entire Navy that it would cause a disruption to the entire Navy. Just based on their experience, they would understand that. To completely reverse something in one fell swoop, would probably cause more disruption than it was worth. Maybe on a grand scale, they were thinking that this was some kind of transition to something that they know is right. But they couldn't change it at the time.

Q. Do you think it's possible that the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy is a transition to allowing open homosexuals to serve in the military?

B. Yes. I don't think it's going to be a fast transition. I think that ten years from now, whatever policy is out there, it's going to be dramatically different from today. The same way the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy is different from what we had ten years ago.

## APPENDIX C

### PRE-INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

To validate our interviews, we must have a record to show that the participants came from varied backgrounds and opinions. Please fill out the following questionnaire as honestly as you can. The information provided here will only be used in aggregate form and no attempt will be made to match this information to individuals or opinions expressed in the interview.

Thank you for your time and patience.

1. I am (a) male (b) female
2. My race/ethnicity is: (a) white (b) black (c) Hispanic (d) other
3. Service Community: \_\_\_\_\_
4. How many years do you have in the Navy? \_\_\_\_\_
5. I have a friend or relative who is a homosexual (a) yes (b) no.

**Answer the following questions on the ten point scale.**

6. On the issue of homosexuality, I am more tolerant than my peers.  
strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 strongly agree

7. On the whole, I like the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy better than the previous policy.  
strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 strongly agree

8. Allowing homosexuals in the Navy can cause the downfall of good order and discipline.  
strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 strongly agree

9. Under the current policy, heterosexuals aboard ships are at greater risk of having their privacy invaded by homosexuals.  
strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 strongly agree

10. The presence of a homosexual in my unit would interfere with unit accomplishment.  
strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 strongly agree



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